

The
OUTBOUND ROAD

ARNOLD MULDER

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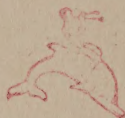
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The Outbound Road

THE OUTBOUND ROAD

By
ARNOLD MULDER

Author of "Bram of the Five Corners," etc.



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The Outbound Road
Part I

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Part I

CHAPTER I

IT was entirely natural that Tante Sarah should be the first to occur to me when it became necessary to find a home for the baby. For a few days it could be taken care of at the hospital where its mother lay dead in the maternity ward, but a permanent place would have to be found soon. What I wanted for it was a real home, and I had reason to believe that Vrouw Spykhoven would be the right kind of mother. . . .

The five o'clock train brought me to East Nassau and I walked the mile and a half to the Spykhoven farm before sundown.

"*Heden! Heden!* If that isn't Kommer!" Tante Sarah's face beamed with a pleasure so genuine that I could not help beaming back at her, although my thoughts were anything but pleasant.

"I should say 'Professor Bakkerzeel,'" grasp-

ing my hand, "but I can't help it; it just slipped out."

To her I would always be "Kommer," the boy who had often fed on her bread and honey in the days when she was not yet a wife and when she lavished the treasure of her motherhood instinct on me, a motherless stripling. Now she was nearly forty, still comely, but inclined to be stout. And she had given up the hope of ever becoming a mother—a real mother. That unsatisfied longing had been replaced by a desire to be mother to another woman's child.

"No, no, don't you 'professor' me." With an effort I mustered a tone of mild gayety. "It seems so good to be called by my first name once in a while."

"*Ja*, that I can believe," with spontaneous enthusiasm. "How you can like it there with all them English is more than I can understand. I would die, Kommer, yes, die, if it was always this English jabbering I'd have to listen to."

"Oh, but I hear Dutch spoken occasionally. You know, they teach it at Christian College; and, besides, it is spoken to a fair extent in De Stad. My landlady, for instance, is as Dutch as you could wish for."

"*Ja*, but such city people!" She knew, of course, that I knew what she meant.

"Does this landlady what you say can talk Dutch" (Vrouw Spykhoven could not help the intimation that the Dutch-ness of a city dweller must be somewhat spurious and put on)—"does she give you pancakes for breakfast? Answer me that! And do you ever get real butter without coloring in it?"

I assured her that my landlady was a very capable woman and second only to Tante Sarah herself as an efficient cook. But Vrouw Spykhoven shook her head doubtfully.

"Men are so easy taken in, even when they're so high up and learn students Latin in such a college. I often think of you, all alone there in De Stad among all them English and such!"

"And I often think of you, Tante." She was not my aunt, of course, but the "tante" was a tribute to the bread-and-honey days.

"But come into the house, Kommer—Professor, I should say; you needn't stand out there like a peddler, not *you*. I'll get some kale from the garden for supper. I know you'll like that."

I had not meant to stay, but the anticipatory gleam of pleasure on Vrouw Spykhoven's face left me no choice. After all, my business was

rather delicate and could not be disposed of in a moment. It was possible that difficulties might arise.

Foppe Spykhoven came in from the cow-yard with two buckets of foam-covered milk.

"Zoo, Professor Bakkerzeel!" he greeted me in dignified welcome. It was characteristic of Foppe Spykhoven that he did not thoughtlessly omit my title, as Tante Sarah had done.

A short time later we were sitting on the steps of the kitchen porch where the pleasant smell of the kale Tante Sarah was cooking reached us through the open door.

"You have climbed high, Professor, very high," Foppe Spykhoven was saying in a tone of almost paternal commendation, "but think what responsibility this involves! How old are you—twenty-six? I thought I had that right. Still very young to have a position like that, but I always knew you had it in you. Years ago when you were a little boy, I predicted that you would climb high."

He could not know that all this was gall and wormwood to me, and my silence did not deter him from continuing:

"East Nassau is proud of you; we have believed in you all these years and we believe

you'll go still higher. It is a great thing to be a leader, and think what your example will mean to the young people of East Nassau now and in the future!"

I made a disclaimer with the best grace I could muster; if he only knew what I was thinking!

It was not until after supper, at which Vrouw Spykhoven hospitably urged more mashed potato and kale on me than I could comfortably eat, that I found an opportunity to speak of the homeless baby.

It was Tante Sarah who gave me the opening.

"Have you seen Bertha's little boy?" I caught the familiar note of wistfulness in her voice.

No, I had not seen her sister's child.

"Now there is one I would like to see follow in your footsteps," Foppe Spykhoven broke in; "of course, he's only six months old—"

"Not quite six," interrupted Tante Sarah; "five months and twenty-two days."

Foppe was visibly annoyed by the interruption, as his glance at his wife showed patently. The brief pause that followed was in the nature of a rebuke.

"As I was saying, he's young yet, but that

don't make any difference. It's never too early to start, I'm thinking."

Tante Sarah absent-mindedly rested her knitting needles. Were her thoughts with the baby in her sister's home, the baby her arms ached for?

"Now if I had had a boy," continued Foppe in a tone out of which he carefully kept all wistfulness, "I would have been thinking of training him up for something like that from the very start."

There was an awkward pause.

"That's really what I came for to-night," I heard myself stammer; "that is, in a manner of speaking, it is that I came for."

I saw Vrouw Spykhoven start and I saw her face flush.

"What you came for, Kommer?"

I told the two of them the story of the baby in the hospital.

"I felt somehow that you would be the right mother for him, Tante Sarah—and you the right father, Mr. Spykhoven."

But that was an afterthought.

I could see from the look of her that Tante Sarah was all eagerness, but that she was waiting for her husband to speak.

"And what sort of people are his parents, or, rather, were his parents—because I gather from what you say they are dead?"

I swallowed nervously, although the question was, of course, not unexpected. But I couldn't speak.

"Not Christian parents, I suppose."

Knowing as I did Foppe Spykhoven's definition of the word "Christian," I was compelled to admit that I could not give the baby an unclouded pedigree.

There was deep thoughtfulness on the face of Foppe Spykhoven.

"I was thinking what it would mean to have a child—to adopt one not born of Christian parents. Think, Sarah, what that would mean!"

I saw the shimmer of tears in Vrouw Spykhoven's eyes.

"It would mean greater responsibility for us—stricter discipline, Sarah; and you would have to make up your mind not to let your feelings get the best of you."

I was beginning to doubt the wisdom of having come here to find a home for the baby, and I might have withdrawn the offer had not a sudden look of hopelessness in the eyes of Tante Sarah arrested the impulse.

"You see," continued Foppe, in the same grave tone, "it has pleased the Lord to withhold children from us, and I have sometimes been thinking that it might be wicked to try to get out from under that judgment by adopting one. That feeling was made all the stronger when twice we tried to adopt a child and twice it was taken away from us."

I said nothing, determined now to let matters take their own course.

"But, Foppe," pleaded Tante Sarah, "is it not possible that we are meant to save this baby? Think what will become of it if we do not take it! Some such *English* people will maybe take it and then—"

It was not necessary to finish the sentence. Her husband knew all she had in mind.

"That's something I haven't overlooked. Maybe that's the way to look at it—maybe that's the way."

But there was hesitation in his voice.

"And you say she was such an actress—and—and—Polish—and Catholic?"

"She was a great actress, Mr. Spykhoven, a great artist." But this defense meant nothing to Foppe. "A great artist—or would have been if she had lived."

"Such an actress!" Foppe Spykhoven raised his eyebrows. "And you knew her *personally*—this actress?"

Involuntarily I quailed before his level gaze. But I answered truthfully that I did. Foppe Spykhoven raised his grave eyes to me in surprise.

"I met her two years ago for the first time—in Chicago when I was doing summer post-graduate work there at the university. She was a cultured woman and well educated. I learned to know her quite well, and I—I sympathized with her when trouble came. That's how I'm taking an interest in her child now. She was practically a stranger here."

"But such an *actress*!"

I concluded that it would be useless to pursue the subject further.

"Of course, Mr. Spykhoven, if you feel that way about it, it might be unwise for you to take the child. I'm not urging you to do so. I merely came here thinking that you and Tante Sarah would be glad of the opportunity."

This brought something like a moan from Tante Sarah. She had been indulging in dreams of the baby out there in its little crib in the hospital.

"No, no, that isn't what I mean. I'm not saying right out we won't take the boy; I'm not saying that—not that. I was only asking what to expect. It's natural we should want to know all about his parents."

"*Ja, ja*, Kommer, you couldn't expect anything else," exclaimed Vrouw Spykhoven, hope dawning in her eyes again.

"Certainly," I agreed.

"And we can go to De Stad to-morrow," continued Foppe; "there will be time enough to make up our minds."

When I left the farm that night I felt certain that a home had been found for the boy. Foppe Spykhoven never acted in haste. He always turned a thing over in his mind before he took any step. But I felt certain that if Tante Sarah once had held the baby in her arms all would be well.

CHAPTER II

It was the disreputable Oom Jo, Vrouw Spyk-hoven's drunkard brother, who was indirectly responsible for the first great sorrow in the life of the boy. In after years Teunis always dated the beginning of his conscious existence from the incident. The period that came before it was lost in the vague glimmerings of the semi-consciousness of childhood, glimmerings which memory failed to register definitely. But the episode in which Oom Jo was a vicarious actor was chiseled into the brain of the boy. It marked the beginning of his life.

It happened when Teunis was not yet quite four years old. He had grown into a sturdy youngster, black-eyed like his mother, with a tangled mass of raven-black hair that never failed to remind me of her beautiful wealth of hair as I saw it last in thick braids on the pillow in the hospital. Somehow this and the rich olive complexion of the boy, also inherited from her, always caused an unconscious tug at my heart whenever I saw the child. He was uncannily like his mother, and I often thanked God for that.

There was even that undefined suggestion of the foreigner about him that had always been one of her chief charms for me—eloquent of her Polish blood.

Little Teunis, to the evident annoyance of Foppe Spykhoven, had taken a liking to his uncle of unsavory reputation. And the latter eagerly returned the affection so gratuitously offered.

"I wish Oom Jo would stay away," Foppe complained when the drunkard began to make a practice of coming often to the farm.

"But Teunis likes him," was Vrouw Spykhoven's all-sufficient answer.

"That's just the trouble, Teunis likes him; that's where the danger comes in. The heart of man is treacherous and full of sin from youth upward. And we can't begin too early training him right. Oom Jo can't but have a bad influence on him."

"But he's so young yet!" It seemed impossible to Vrouw Spykhoven that the beautiful little black-eyed boy could have any affiliation with evil. Theoretically she knew, of course, that he had, but—

"Never too young to be sinful. We're all conceived and born in sin. And you must remem-

ber who his parents were—such actors! Our responsibility for him is great. Sometimes I think it would have been better not to have adopted him.”

Vrouw Spykhoven drew Teunis to her protectingly. There was a momentary flash of fierce mother-jealousy in her eyes. It seemed downright wicked to say such a thing. Suppose they should be punished by having the child taken away! A stab of pain shot through her.

“*Nu*, you must talk to Oom Jo about it,” Foppe closed the discussion.

But Vrouw Spykhoven could not find it in her heart to deny the house to her brother. Ashamed she often felt of him, and his drunken debauches made her blush when the people of East Nassau discussed them freely in her presence. There had been a time, too, when she had blamed him with a fierceness quite unnatural to her; but since the advent of Teunis she had unconsciously swung round to championship of Oom Jo. He loved Teunis and Teunis loved him. That was enough for Vrouw Spykhoven.

Time passed and Oom Jo continued to come to the Spykhoven farm. With a huge jackknife he made all manner of strange toys for the boy.

And Teunis's large black eyes watched his uncle with a wistful eagerness that seemed to say that not a movement of a finger could be allowed to go without mental record.

It was after a visit of Oom Jo—a visit made during the day when Foppe was away at work—that the foster father was startled by a strangely familiar attitude which the child struck in the course of his lonely play. There was something about it that reminded Foppe of some one. Only a fleeting suggestion at first, but enough to attract his attention.

Teunis swayed and staggered through the room. He caught hold of the table as if to save himself from falling. Then his laugh rang out rich and clear. He gauged the distance to the other side of the room as though mentally estimating whether he could negotiate the task of reaching it. He shouted to an imaginary person at the goal of his intended journey and held his hand back of his right ear as if to catch the reply of the distant companion.

Foppe Spykhoven no longer doubted. The gesture was unquestionably that of Oom Jo. Slightly deaf, the drunkard invariably made his hand come to the rescue of his ear. Foppe did not interfere. He resolved to collect data to

prove not only the innate sinfulness of the child, but the bad influence of his wife's brother as well.

Suddenly in the game he was playing with himself Teunis allowed his little body to lurch against the leg of the table. And instantly, with such verisimilitude that the father received the inevitable impression that it was an outburst of anger, came the exclamation, clear and distinct:

"Damn!"

Foppe Spykhoven jumped. But bethinking himself of his resolve to collect evidence, he repressed the natural impulse to interfere.

All unconsciously Teunis pursued his game. He imitated every characteristic gesture of his uncle. Screwing up his little olive-tinted face into some semblance of the lined visage of the drunkard, lurching, laughing in the shrill note of Oom Jo, he pursued his way about the room.

For a moment he paused, apparently to make the illusion more complete. The little brain was working rapidly, recalling other gestures. Then the child's face lighted up with the unconscious pleasure of the artist who has found far back somewhere in the uncharted regions of his mind the image he has been eagerly pursuing. Placing his little fingers on the side of his nose, Teunis

cocked his head to one side, as he had seen Oom Jo do hundreds of times; then he blew the other nostril with all the power that his vigorous lungs could muster. It was the only way the usually handkerchiefless Oom Jo had of blowing his nose.

Intentionally Teunis struck his hand against the stove, and again Foppe was horrified by that same startling expletive:

“Damn!”

Foppe Spykhoven jumped. Teunis laughed. The word seemed to fascinate him. Again and again, in closer and closer succession, he poured all the joy of his young life into an endless repetition of “Damn!” “Damn!”

A wave of unreasoning anger swept over Foppe.

“Teunis, come here!” An electric shock of surprise shot through the boy, and he forgot to obey the command.

Foppe Spykhoven, usually deliberate, lost his temper. Disobedience, if possible, was a more heinous crime than profanity. He jerked little Teunis up from the floor and administered a beating then and there that brought Vrouw Spykhoven running pell-mell from the kitchen. She caught her husband’s arm as he was about

to strike again. Teunis was crying piteously, as much from fright as from pain. Vrouw Spyk-hoven tore him away from her husband and stood over him protectingly.

Her eyes flashed and for a moment there was hate in them, hate such as the man had never before seen there in all their twenty years of wedded life.

Foppe turned white.

"But he swore, Sarah," he defended himself after his wife's swift look of hate had died out of her eyes; "think now, swore!"

Little Teunis was sitting in the lap of his mother, his face buried against her dress, his body shaking with convulsive sobs.

"Swore?" There was a look of incredulity in the face of the woman.

It was this look that again made Foppe's anger burst forth.

"Yes, swore! That's what I said, didn't I—swore! Do you believe it now? He swore, I tell you; and if that isn't enough for you I can be plainer. He said, 'Damn! damn! damn!' Now will you believe me?"

"I didn't say I didn't believe you, Foppe. You needn't get so angry about it. But the boy is so little, he can't have understood what he

said. That must be it; he must have heard it somewhere. He's always aping everybody. He can't have understood, poor boy!"

She bent down to kiss the heavy shock of tumbled hair.

"It's that worthless brother of yours," Foppe fumed. "I've told you again and again to keep him away from here, but if you can't do that, some one will have to stand the consequences. It's him the boy was aping, walking like a drunken man and then swearing."

It was Vrouw Spykhoven's turn to quail. Instantly she saw the advantage her husband was gaining. And Foppe, also seeing it, became calmer.

"As I told you when we adopted him, we have a greater responsibility toward the child than if he was from Christian parents. He's not a child of the Covenant; he's bearing the load of sin of his parents; and he's bearing his own load in which he was born and conceived. I tell you all this aping is the sin of his parents breaking out—such actors!"

Vrouw Spykhoven held her boy closer. She was beginning to realize that more punishment was to follow. And her own responsibility in not forbidding Oom Jo the house tied her hands.

Foppe felt he must be firm now. As much by way of object-lesson in discipline for his wife as for the sake of adequately punishing the child, he decided on a deliberate course of action. Upstairs was one room of which Teunis stood in mortal terror. It was isolated from the other rooms by a long, dark hall and was seldom used. In it stood only a superannuated couch and a battered trunk. On the few occasions that Teunis had been in the room in the company of his mother in broad daylight he had instinctively gripped her hand in a firmer clasp. And often, in playing the endless games he was always inventing, he had threatened the family dog with banishment to this childhood purgatory.

To this room Teunis was banished. Vrouw Spykhoven shuddered, but she dared not protest. It was not until later in the evening when Foppe issued the ultimatum that the boy was to spend the night there that she made a fight. The cries of Teunis could be heard in the kitchen, and Vrouw Spykhoven, as best she could, fought for her baby. But Foppe was obdurate; the child must be disciplined. Foppe allowed Tante Sarah to provide the old couch with quilts for the boy's comfort, but spend the night there he must. Vrouw Spykhoven man-

aged to put him to sleep by assurances that she would stay with him, and then she left him with a heavy heart. Foppe locked the door of the room and pocketed the key, later hiding it in the barn.

It was after midnight when Teunis awoke. Vrouw Spykhoven, who had not slept, heard the first startled creakings of the old couch. She hurried upstairs to be as near her baby as possible. And all night long until the day broke the little boy lay moaning against the door of his prison, and on the other side of the door, with a rug folded around her, lay Tante Sarah suppressing her sobs to whisper assurances to the frightened child.

And he did not understand—not then nor later when he had returned to good standing. It is doubtful if he ever learned to understand why he was locked up in that room.

But it was for him the first intimation that life is not all a beautiful game. And it was the end of babyhood. The burden of real life had been laid upon his young shoulders, and there seemed to be a menace in its weight.

CHAPTER III

I DON'T wish to give the impression that Teunis's boyhood was a *via dolorosa* of punishments. In his own curiously inarticulate way Foppe Spykhoven lavished a good deal of tenderness on the child. He would go so far as to call him *mijn jongen*, which was a great deal for the rigidly undemonstrative man—like a hug and a kiss from anybody else.

And Teunis in his way returned the affection. It would never have entered his head to kiss the stern, bearded man. He subdued his hilarity when Foppe entered the house and he eyed his foster father calculatingly to ascertain from the immobile features if possible how much the man would stand.

But in spite of all this he would unhesitatingly have backed his father against any or all other fathers. That is, if such a notion could have entered his head, which it couldn't. There simply could not be any other father for him. The bearded man was *his* father. That was all there was to it. Of course, he didn't like to be thrashed; neither does the dog that licks the

hand of his master even while it is holding the whip.

And the punishments might not have been as frequent as they were if Foppe Spykhoven had not been obsessed with the idea of saving the boy's soul by chastisement. And most often it was Teunis's unfortunate penchant for "such play-acting" that brought trouble down upon his head. Foppe, with a prayer in his heart, had set himself the stern task of safeguarding his boy against this special sin of his parents.

And Teunis as he grew up learned to trim his sails to meet the old man's desires. He managed to be seldom caught. But now and again he forgot himself, as, for instance, on the day when he played Indian. He was seven or eight at the time. Tempted by the deceptive warmth of early May he had coaxed his cousin Kees and Esther, the "wooden-shoe man's" girl, to join him in taking off shoes and stockings. It was on the way home from school and Teunis argued plausibly that all three of them could put them on again behind the big elm tree, and their parents none the wiser.

But this deep-laid scheme went wrong. The children were tempted by a cornfield of which the shocks that had remained over from the

preceding fall would serve beautifully as Indian wigwams. It was Teunis's idea and he led the way, the soft mud of the field oozing deliciously between his toes. The field was out beyond the pond, some little distance from the road.

In their absorption in the drama that Teunis built up roughly after the story of Captain John Smith in the school reader the children forgot time. Teunis was Captain Smith and he was saving Pocahontas from a bloody Indian chief. That he had the rôles of the principal characters reversed did not worry him.

Suddenly, almost with the abruptness of a clap of thunder it seemed to them, it was dark and the road seemed miles away. The white line of it lay out there somewhere in the vague, shimmering distance, beyond the pond with its fringe of weed-infested marsh in which bull-frogs were booming forth their joy in the spring-time or whatever it is that makes bull-frogs boom. What else besides bull-frogs might not be lurking in that terrible marsh?

Kees looked at Teunis and Teunis looked at Kees. Esther was fighting hard to keep back the tears. Their shoes and stockings were hidden somewhere in a "wigwam," but they did not dare go and look for them. They did not dare

move. Liberally covered with the dirt of the cornfield they huddled together shivering, for the evening had turned cold, as early May evenings have a way of doing.

It was thus Foppe Spykhoven found them a half-hour later, after he had been searching since sunset. All three were more than glad of the rescue even though they knew unpleasant results were to follow.

"*Nu*," said Foppe gruffly.

That terrible "*Nu*"—half question, half demand for an explanation—must be met somehow; and though he was the youngest of the trio, Teunis instinctively felt that the burden of the explanation was upon him.

"We was playin'," he ventured lamely.

"But your shoes and stockings,"—pointing to the bare legs,—"*didn't* I tell you not to take 'em off? And you, too, Kees; I thought you'd know better."

"Teunis done it first," whimpered Kees.

"*Nu!*" Foppe again addressed Teunis. The boy's lip trembled, but he said nothing. . . .

This time Foppe took up the matter of discipline with deliberation. He would not allow himself to be surprised into hasty anger again. Even after Teunis had made the mistake, later

in the evening, of trying to explain about the Indian drama, Foppe did not lose his temper. There was a grim look on his face as he listened.

"I knew from the beginning that we were assuming a great responsibility," he explained to Tante Sarah, "but I did not expect the evil to crop out so early."

Tante Sarah's eyes were red; she knew what all this foreboded. Teunis also was not deceived because the punishment had not been immediate.

After the dishes had been washed, Foppe seated Teunis before him on a straight-backed chair. Taking his own position opposite, he opened the big Dutch family Bible. Turning to the fifteenth chapter of 1 Samuel, he read in slow, measured tones the story of the disobedience of Saul and its results, laying special stress on the words, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Under ordinary circumstances Teunis would have been rather interested in the gory tale, not because of its moral, but because of its blood. But there was something sinister in the tones of the reader. Coming to the end of the chapter, Foppe quoted the words that were often on his lips about the Lord chastising them that He

loveth. And he looked at the boy significantly. Teunis understood not a word of the real meaning of it all.

"You are to be punished for two reasons, my boy." There was not a suggestion of either anger or compassion in the man's voice. "First, for disobedience, and second, for this acting." And again he quoted the Scripture words about the special love of the Lord for those who feel his chastising hand.

"Come, now, Teunis," he concluded in the same colorless tone.

"What's you going to do, Foppe?" cried the mother at last.

"I'm taking him to the barn to give him the punishment he needs. And you are to stay right here," he added menacingly.

Vrouw Spykhoven was cowed. And for Teunis's sake she obeyed, knowing that her coming to the barn would only make the punishment heavier. Even when she heard the boy's muffled cries she did not move. Digging her finger nails into her flesh to keep control of herself, she sat in dry-eyed misery, each blow from the "raw-hide" as it fell upon the body of the boy torturing her with spasms of almost physical pain. And it was hours later before

the sobs of Teunis and his mother were stilled in sleep. . . .

East Nassau, of course, applauded. Foppe's was the only course to take.

"They'll get into trouble with that boy," Vrouw Boerma defended her own Kees; "mark my word, they'll get into trouble. You can see it in his eyes. He's bad clear through. And Sarah is so daft about him too. If it wasn't for Foppe being strict there would be no hope for him at all."

"*Ja*, he's queer," admitted her husband; "he's always aping some one, and there can't come no good of that, I tell you. But then, they learn 'em such queer things in the schools nowadays. Now when I was a boy we really learned something."

"*Ja*," assented Vrouw Boerma, "that's all true; but it's *in* the boy too—you can't get around that. Just look at Kees; he's in the same school and the same class as Teunis, but he don't cut up such queer capers and he don't go 'round wasting his time apin' people. It's only when he is led astray by Teunis that he does something like yesterday and disobeys."

Vrouw Boerma was called from the room by the insistent cries of her other two children,

and her husband, being assured by Kees again that it had been Teunis who had tempted him, allowed his son to go to bed unpunished.

The incident created bad blood between the cousins. Kees was inclined to twit Teunis about the "hideing" he had received, and Teunis felt injured because Kees had not been served in the same way.

Things came to a head when Kees spread the story in school that Esther was Teunis's "gurl." Teunis went white with fury and his feelings could only be relieved by exploding into Oom Jo's favorite "damn." And when the horrified Kees threatened to tell Oom Foppe, Teunis threw all prudence to the wind and fought his cousin then and there under the trees in the school-yard.

The boys came out of the affair with nothing worse than bloody noses, but Teunis knew that for him the battle's aftermath would be worse than the battle itself. So he said "damn" once more for good measure.

That evening Foppe Spykhoven again faced the necessity of inflicting punishment on Teunis. The facts about the fight and what had led up to it he had quite easily gathered from Kees's mother. And the evidence against Teunis was

damning. He had indulged in the sin of profanity again, and Vrouw Boerma's eyes were big with horror. Also Teunis had forced Kees to fight.

Foppe once more did his duty firmly, setting his mouth into a hard line of determination. Vrouw Spykhoven wept softly in the house when she heard the cries of her boy from the barn. But later that night she gathered courage to remonstrate with her husband. Having made up her mind to this, she entered the bedroom whither Foppe had gone immediately after applying the "raw-hide" to Teunis. To buttress her courage Tante Sarah had worked herself up into as much of a state of anger as her kindly nature was capable of. For once she was going to speak out to Foppe. He was probably asleep by this time, as it was all of an hour since he had entered his bedroom. But that fact would not save him, Vrouw Spykhoven determined grimly.

She opened the bedroom door and stopped. Foppe was on his knees before the bed, his voice rising in whispered prayer. His eyes were closed and he did not hear the door open. His face was lined with pain, and the sympathetic woman who a moment before had drawn her mouth into a

stern line of determination could read the traces of the anguish the man was passing through. Her anger fell away from her, and her heart melted in tenderness. Softly stepping back she closed the door with the care of one who guards the fitful slumbers of an ailing child.

CHAPTER IV

FOPPE SPYKHOVEN was reading "De Grondwet," looking up occasionally to impart bits of news to Tante Sarah who was knitting woolen stockings for Teunis to wear the following winter. The boy himself lay prone on the kitchen floor engaged with strenuous intensity in drawing exercises, which art happened to be a passion with him just then.

"It says here," said Foppe, adjusting his glasses, "that they're going to have such another fair in De Stad."

"Zoo?" Tante Sarah evinced a mild interest.

"Ja, and all I can say is that it's *schandalig*."

At this word Teunis, who had not been listening, looked up. To the boy there was always something fascinating in this word *schandalig*. Experience had taught him that, as used by his father, it often described something interesting.

"The people will flock to it in crowds and droves," continued Foppe. "How many was it last year—ten thousand in one day? Well, anyway, there will be thousands of them. And they will come from East Nassau as well as from any-

where else. That's what I call *schandalig*. East Nassau that prides itself on being Christian! But they go, some of the old people even, to say nothing of the young folks."

"*Ja, ja,*" Vrouw Spykhoven agreed in an absent-minded tone of assent.

Teunis was now thoroughly interested. That county fair must be something wonderful. It had earned the disapproval of his father!

"But that's all the present generation thinks of—fun and pleasure and going to fairs! People don't seem to realize any more there is anything at all serious to live for. They don't know what life means. Why, I've been told that some of the professors from our school have been seen there, but that I can't believe."

Teunis had no idea what a fair might be. But he was too experienced to ask questions. A better way was to find out for himself.

"There they have such horse-races," continued Foppe—"the work of the devil plain and simple. Horses wasn't created for that. They was meant to be used, not to race for fun or money. It's wrong and no one can ever call it right, at least no Christian that is worth the name."

"No, that seems plain enough," assented

Tante Sarah, who had never given the question any thought.

Horse-racing! The eyes of little Teunis sparkled. There was a flush on his olive-tinted face.

"And then those shows," resumed Foppe, "they are worse yet. Talk about opéra-houses and all such as you find in De Stad. I'm not the man to talk for them; everybody knows that. But what I say is these shows at the fair are as wicked in every way as the worst opéra-house. And I've known people who call themselves Christians that went into them. And they give as an excuse that it was only in a tent. That's what I call wicked blindness. And some day their sins will find them out."

Shows! "Opéra"-houses! Again the boy's eyes sparkled.

"And then to give men and women premiums for the fruits of the field that God has given them, that's what I call going in the face of everything that's holy. Here God gives me a big pumpkin or big ears of corn or big apples or big potatoes. And I take them over to the fair and show them there and get a prize. What does it mean—just think of it, Sarah—what does it mean? It means that men are saying as how it was me and not God that made the pumpkin or

the corn or the apples or the potatoes *big*. I get the prize and never think of God or his blessings. I get the money and use it for such races and opra-shows and such other vanities. If you call that Christian—to say nothing of Calvinistic—I don't know what is Christian or Calvinistic."

"*Ja, ja*," from Tante Sarah again. "I can't see how they don't put a stop to those fairs."

A stab of fear shot through Teunis. What if they should stop them before he had had an opportunity to see them! His original thought had been that he would investigate some time in the vague future, when he was grown up. But this remark of his mother served to make him revise that plan. It seemed that haste was required.

The next day he accosted his friend Klaas Quant when he met the peddler on the highway:

"Going to the fair, Klaas Quant?"

"I don't think so, Teunis Spykhoven," the man laughed.

Teunis was disappointed in his friend. Evidently Klaas Quant thought going to the fair was wrong, and seemingly he was therefore afraid. To show his own superiority to puerile fears the boy announced confidently:

"I am."

"You are? Well, I wouldn't have thought that. Father going to take you?"

"No, father says it's wicked!"

"I see—going to go it alone on your own responsibility."

Teunis did not know what "responsibility" (or rather its Dutch equivalent, that being, of course, the language the peddler used) meant. But he said "Yes" at a venture.

"And who's going to pay the shot, my little man?" asked the peddler, patting the shock of raven-black hair.

"Shot?" wonderingly.

"In other words, who is to foot the bill, for I take it you haven't a season pass."

Teunis looked more mystified than before.

"I was only joking," smiled Klaas Quant. "What I was asking you was, who's going to pay your way in? You know, it costs money to get into a fair. It's fifteen cents for children."

Teunis's face fell. Here was a contingency he had not calculated on. Fifteen cents! It might as well have been fifteen thousand dollars. His lip quivered and the sparkle died out of his eyes.

"You poor little devil!" mumbled Klaas

Quant to himself. The peddler stood lost in thought for a moment.

"I've got it!" he cried presently.

Teunis's eyes got back a gleam of hope.

"I'm awfully tired," lied Klaas Quant; "if you'll get your express wagon and carry my packs on to Jan Boerma's farm, I'll have something for you."

Teunis was all eagerness. He had no idea what connection the peddler's proposal had with going to the fair, but he liked Klaas Quant, and he had often pitied him, burdened by two large packs.

Arrived at Oom Jan Boerma's farm, Klaas Quant held out a dollar to Teunis.

"That's your pay for your work," he said.

Teunis took the silver dollar and looked at it with awe.

"You can use some of it to get into the fair with; the rest you'll need for spending-money when you're once in."

Teunis was overwhelmed. He did not know quite what to make of it, but his whole generous soul was in his eyes as he tried to thank his benefactor. The peddler turned away to hide his face from the boy.

"Poor little devil!" he murmured as he watched Teunis trotting homeward. . . .

Klaas Quant was an institution in East Nassau. Burdened down by two packs he could be seen almost any day traversing the countryside, walking with deliberation along the rural highways. At each farmhouse he stopped to display his wares: handkerchiefs and side-combs and strings of beads and mouth-organs and hat-pins and needles and dress goods and boys' caps and hair restorers and corn-cob pipes and bottles of Haarlem Oil, and a thousand other articles that might tempt the East Nassau folk to buy.

To Teunis he was as much a part of the natural order of things as his father or his mother. Life would have seemed a queer business without Klaas Quant in it. Invariably the peddler timed his trips, when in the neighborhood, so that he arrived at the Spykhoven farm at dusk. That meant that he was asked to spend the night there. The time came when this was taken for granted and Klaas Quant, arriving in the evening, would deposit his packs on the kitchen floor and prepare for the night's sojourn. There was an old couch in the summer kitchen on which he always slept, and Teunis had denominated it "Klaas Quant's couch."

"And how's my little boy to-day?" the

peddler would inquire, patting Teunis on the head as the boy stood eagerly by, waiting for the packs to be opened. He knew that some little gift would be forthcoming for him. It was a way Klaas Quant had of paying for the night's lodging.

"It ain't paying for it," he would say to Tante Sarah, "but I like to see the boy's eyes shine."

"No, it ain't paying for it," Tante Sarah would repeat to her husband when discussing the peddler, "but who'd want pay for a night's sleep and a little supper and breakfast!"

"No, no, we couldn't think of that, of course," Foppe would reply.

"It seems as how he always manages to be here at night," Tante Sarah would sometimes wonder.

"That's because he knows what's good for him. I always tell you, Sarah, we don't have to stand back for nobody when it comes to eating."

It was one of Foppe Spykhoven's few points of pride that in his family a table was maintained that needed to "stand back for nobody."

"*Ja, ja*, that may all be true. But I believe he thinks a lot of our Teunis."

"Nonsense; what would such a peddler care for a mere boy?"

"But he says he likes to make his eyes shine," Vrouw Spykhoven would defend herself.

"*Ja*, that's easy to say. What with saying this and that Klaas Quant gets off cheap for sleeping and eating."

But Tante Sarah could never agree with her husband on this point. She was proudly certain that her dark-eyed, olive-skinned little son was the sole reason why Klaas Quant preferred the Spykhoven farm as a place of lodging. It made her proud and happy and caused her to see something beautiful in the rugged face of the unkempt old man.

CHAPTER V

A WEEK later Teunis and Kees and Esther were on their way to the county fair.

After he had recovered somewhat from the wonder of having a whole dollar, Teunis had performed some mighty operations in arithmetic. Fifteen cents, the peddler had said, was the price of admission for children. That fact the boy clung to with the tenacity of a bull-dog's grip. On it depended all his later calculations. If this foundation stone should be defective the whole structure he built up on it would topple. He had devoted a whole day to the stupendous task of balancing his accounts before he took the step he had determined on from the first. To make doubly sure he had placed a supposititious case before his mother.

"How many cents in a dollar, mother?"

"*Heden!* What questions the boy asks! One hundred, of course."

"And how much is fifteen and fifteen and fifteen?"

Vrouw Spykhoven performed some operations on her fingers before replying, "Forty-five, of course."

"I thought so." And Teunis trotted away happy.

Esther and Kees could go with him and there would still be a fortune left for the three of them to spend at the fair. It took some persuasion to get Kees to embark on the tremendous adventure, but Esther was all eagerness.

The three children trudged along the country road on their seven-mile journey. They were supposed to be in school, which fact gave more zest to the adventure. Teunis made the distance seem short by drawing on his imagination, describing the wonders they were to encounter at the fair. And during all the journey the "opra show" was most frequently mentioned.

And it was the "opra show" that immediately attracted the children's attention at the fair. Teunis, who was the treasurer of the company, set aside three nickels for admission fees.

Frightened and awed the children walked up the aisle between the blocks of chairs standing on the grass. But the big tent interior, the bunting, the stage, the scores of people, the actors in bespangled clothes—all fired the blood of Teunis, and his eyes flashed. Here was something that he seemed to have been dreaming of a thousand years, and it was a thousand times

more wonderful and beautiful than even his most extravagant imaginings. After the first shock on entering on the unfamiliar scene had passed, the boy responded to the situation. He felt as if his soul were standing on tip-toe.

The antics of the figures on the stage meant little to the children. There were four colored people—colored to an exaggerated blackness, with lips painted to an exaggerated redness. Little Esther shrank back when these minstrels appeared. She was mortally afraid of negroes, never having seen one; but even she lost much of her fear in time. Teunis and Kees and Esther sat with eyes glued to the stage. So steadfast was their rapt gaze that it attracted the attention of the actors and audience.

Teunis's little brain was busy registering new impressions. To-morrow and on to-morrow's to-morrow he would draw from this storehouse to the delight of himself and the other boys in school.

There came a time in the varied programme when the services of a little girl were needed on the stage. She must serve as the daughter of the drunken father. Said drunken father called for a volunteer, but no volunteer was forthcoming. The big man fixed his eyes on Esther.

"There's a little girl that would like to come up on the stage," he wheedled.

Esther shrank back in mortal fear.

"Come on, little girl, I'm not going to hurt you. There's a nickel in it for you—think of it, a whole nickel!"

But Esther shrank back all the more, then burst into tears.

"Come, now, little one, don't get to bawlin'; I ain't goin' to hurt you."

Teunis pressed the hand of Esther to reassure her.

"Wouldn't a boy do?" he whispered, so low that he had to repeat it before the man understood.

"Bless my heart, I never thought of that, but seein' the little girl's bashful and no one else wants the job, you'll do, I guess."

His heart in his mouth, his blood pounding furiously, Teunis followed the drunken father to the stage. A shock of fright made him blanch when he turned and faced the audience. The crowd cheered wildly, and there was something in that cheering that fired the boy's blood and made him forget his fears. He began to feel a certain exhilaration and his eyes flashed.

His duty was to sit still and take abuse from

the drunken father. But after he had begun to feel at home on the rude stage, Teunis could no more have sat still than he could have kept quiet if the tent had been on fire. The drunken father acted for all the world so much like Oom Jo that the boy's hands unconsciously began to move in imitation. He cocked his head to one side, and placing his finger against one nostril, blew his nose. The simple act, almost unconscious on the boy's part, was so excruciatingly funny to the farmer boys and girls who composed most of the audience that they went into hysterics of laughter.

The drunken father bowed his acknowledgment, ignoring the fact that he was supposed to be drunk. The applause and laughter suddenly died down. The actor was mystified.

Teunis repeated the operation and again the laughter burst forth. The applause fired his imagination. Boy though he was, he felt his blood dancing when the uproar broke. He did not reason; he acted by instinct. The clapping of hands irresistibly dragged him from his seat. His soul thirsted for more clapping and more and more. He could not be blowing his nose all the time, and he launched forth on further ventures. He reeled as Oom Jo always reeled

when drunk, and again the audience burst out into a terrific din. A little seven- or eight-year-old shaver drunk was to their minds the quintessence of comedy. The father, who just at that moment happened to be feigning drunken stupor, did not understand the cause of the applause. He arose to bow his acknowledgment again.

"Well, I'm damned!" he mumbled to himself.

A few moments later the curtain dropped. The drunken father drew Teunis into the so-called dressing-room.

When the curtain rose again for the next "opra show" Teunis had been transformed into a star. Hastily taking advantage of the situation, the drunken father, who in real life was a teetotaler and a hard-working county fair showman, had decided on a bold course. He modified the playlet, transforming it from a hair-raising tragedy to a broad, uproarious comedy. It consisted chiefly in Teunis drinking three or four glasses of cold tea and simulating drunkenness.

Teunis entered into the spirit of the game. Forgotten were Esther and Kees. His face glowed, his eyes flashed. He abandoned himself

to the illusion and his soul leaped up in a kind of frenzy. He felt the electric thrill of the audience and the audience felt the electric thrill of the actor. Wave upon wave of sympathy flowed from stage to listeners and from listeners to stage. The boys and girls and men and women shrieked with laughter. They arose on their seats to stamp on their chairs when the grass gave no response to their pedal applause.

And all because Teunis did what he had done a thousand times at home with no one to watch him.

The word went forth on the grounds, and the tent was crowded. People struggled for a chance to get in. The ticket-office took down its sign, "Only Five Cents," and replaced it with another, "Only Ten Cents." But the increase in price had no effect on the crowd. They jostled and shoved, and the seats were always filled.

That night three children, tired but happy, trudged back home along the dusty country road. They had seen little of the fair; practically all their time had been spent in the "opra show." But Teunis was a half-dollar richer than he had been in the morning.

"Here, take this," the highly pleased show-

man had told him, "and come back to-morrow and I'll give you another."

Teunis hugged the half-dollar to himself. Why he should be paid for playing this game he loved he couldn't understand. But he felt as rich as—as—Klaas Quant, and he resolved to go again to-morrow.

As they approached home Kees became afraid. The hour was later than the time when the children were supposed to return from school, and he feared exposure.

"I'm goin' to tell we went," announced Teunis reassuringly.

"Tell!" gasped Kees and Esther in one breath.

"*Ja!*" excitedly, holding up his half-dollar.

That would be the answer to all objections. He had earned real money. He had brought wealth back from the fair. This fact would prove to his father and mother that they had been under a misapprehension as to the alleged wickedness of that institution. He had the proof in his hand. That half-dollar piece of silver would be his passport. It would be his complete vindication.

"And after I've showed it to father and mother, I'll give you and Esther each part," he announced magnanimously.

Early the next morning Teunis and his father were driving along the highway to De Stad. The old horse jogged along contentedly, seemingly unmindful of the fact that the face of his driver was stern and hard. There was no speech between father and son. During all that dreary seven-mile journey not a word was said. Upon the soul of the boy had descended a humiliation so withering that he felt there never again could be a moment of joy for him so long as life would last. He saw the long, dreary years ahead of him, and each would be more dreary than the one that had gone before. His body was still smarting from the punishment he had received the night before, but the physical pain was as nothing to the boy's mental agony.

And his father was suffering an agony no less acute. He was beginning to feel helpless before this boy he had adopted. At one time Foppe had believed that he could conquer the sin in the boy's heart by stern discipline, but he was beginning to have doubts.

"It's the sin of the parents showing in the son," he thought.

He loved the boy passionately. And to see what he loved most in life sinking under the burden of hereditary sin was heartrending. It

had deepened the lines in the man's face and had transformed the look of natural dignity into one of unintermittent pain.

Arrived at the fair grounds, Foppe tied the horse to a tree. He bought tickets for himself and his son and entered. It was early in the forenoon and comparatively few people had arrived on the grounds. The man and the boy walked straight to the tent of the "opra show." Foppe Spykhoven looked neither to right nor to left of him. He felt like Christian walking through Vanity Fair. The lusts of the flesh must not be given an opportunity to lure him. "Let thine eyes look straight before thee," he told himself, quoting Solomon. And he literally saw nothing of the county fair but the tent of the "opra show." Only the music of the merry-go-round and the raucous voices of show-criers he could not escape.

Arrived at the "opra show," he insisted on buying tickets for himself and the boy, although the ticket-seller, recognizing Teunis, wished to pass both in.

"I refuse to take a bribe from the devil," said Foppe with dignity.

The ticket-seller looked him over with open-mouthed amazement. Foppe had spoken in

Dutch, but there was something in the farmer's face that made the showman understand and gasp.

Foppe and Teunis marched down the aisle between the blocks of chairs that yesterday had been occupied by crowds of people vociferously cheering the country boy in his first venture in theatricals. Fortunately there were as yet few people in the tent. Teunis did not dare look to right or left of him. He longed with his whole soul to have the ordeal over with as soon as possible. If only he could have died before entering the tent!

The two bizarre figures marched to the stage, Foppe leading and Teunis following shamefacedly. The "drunken father" was in the midst of the intoxication scene.

"Is that the man?" said Foppe in Dutch, oblivious to the fact that he was breaking in on the serious business of the performance.

"Sit down!" yelled some one in the audience; and another cried, "Throw him out!"

Foppe's eyes betrayed a sudden angry gleam, but he gave no sign that he had heard the words.

"*Nu!*" said Foppe, and he looked at Teunis.

The boy stepped up to the showman, who had

stopped in the middle of the performance when he saw that something unusual was imminent. He signed to the attendant to ring down the curtain, but divining his intention, Foppe motioned him to desist.

"*Nu!*" he repeated, turning to Teunis again, and the boy quaked in terror at his voice.

Stepping up to the showman Teunis held out the half-dollar he had earned the day before.

"I ain't to keep the devil's money," he whispered. It was the best translation he could manage of the words Foppe had commanded him to speak. He turned away quickly, but his father stopped him.

"Say it again and loud enough so all can hear," he commanded in Dutch.

Teunis once more pronounced the hateful words in a loud tone that broke in a hysterical cry:

"I ain't to keep the devil's money!"

The showman took the half-dollar mechanically. A girl in the audience shrieked with nervous fright. People looked at one another meaningly and did not move. Some one slipped out of the tent to find an officer. What if the hard-faced man on the stage should suddenly become violent!

No one offered any resistance, and looking neither to right nor left, Foppe retraced his steps to the door of the tent, followed by Teunis who was bowed down with utter shame. Still looking neither to left nor to right, the man walked back to the gate of the grounds. Unhitching his horse from the tree, he lifted Teunis to the seat of the buggy and climbed in beside the boy.

As they jogged back homeward the music of the merry-go-round and the low-toned hum of the busy life on the grounds followed them. To Teunis it cried out with a million voices of invitation and of joy. He was like the sinner in the parable barred from the joy of heaven, banished to the region of desolation where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

CHAPTER VI

THEY had driven half the distance home before Foppe Spykhoven spoke.

"Do you know, *mijn jongen*, how much sorrow you're causing me and your mother?"

Teunis did not answer. Foppe's tone had not been at all unkindly, but so deep was the humiliation of Teunis that the boy could not rise to a comprehension of so comparatively small a matter as the troubles of some one else.

"Sorrow to you and mother! Do you realize what sorrow you are causing *me*?"

That was his contemptuous thought—a wordless thought that he could not have expressed even had it been clearly formulated.

"I see that it becomes necessary to tell you about your origin," pursued Foppe in his dignified and somewhat stilted Dutch that distinctly loses flavor by being translated; Foppe Spykhoven could not have been quite Foppe Spykhoven in another tongue.

He paused with just the suggestion of uncertainty in his manner.

"I had hoped that it would not be necessary to tell you this till you had reached years of discretion. But I am beginning to see that the sins of your parents are too strong for you: and by telling you now I may help you to fight against them."

Foppe showed his nervousness by slapping the horse with the reins.

"You are the son of such an actress!"

Foppe said it in the manner of one who is letting loose a sensation. His voice trembled. Teunis looked up for the first time. He was not sure what his father meant, but at least it sounded interesting!

"You didn't know I wasn't your father?"

Teunis was silent. As a matter of fact, this announcement of Foppe's was not so great a shock to the boy as the father believed.

"And your mother is not your real mother." Again Foppe Spykhoven nervously slapped the horse with the reins.

How could all this free the boy from his humiliation and make up for his expulsion from the joy of life? Again it was not a definite thought, merely an instinctive inward cry for the right to be happy.

"You were born in a hospital in De Stad.

Your mother, as I said, was such an actress, and your father—”

Foppe paused. He knew really nothing against the father beyond the fact that he had basely deserted the woman in her hour of need.

“I and your mother, we took you up and we reared you and took care of you. We put you in a Christian home and gave you Christian training. We have worked for you and prayed for you and have done all we could to save you from sin. But you have grown worse and worse. I can see it plain; it’s the sin of your parents cropping out. I’m telling you all this so you can help us instead of hindering. You must fight against the sin that you were conceived in and born in, else Satan will get the upper hand.”

Teunis’s mental picture of Satan was taken bodily from the Dutch version of “Pilgrim’s Progress.” The hoofs and tail and horns stood out prominently. It appeared from the picture in the book that Christian had got the best of this most interesting adversary; and Teunis had enough of an instinctive belief in his own vitality to feel confident that what another had done he could do. He sensed the dramatic possibilities of an encounter with his satanic majesty, and instead of his father’s warning giving him pause,

it made him prick up his mental ears. Possibly, after all, there might be something to live for!

And Teunis literally did not hear another word. His little brain was busy with the battle against the Prince of Darkness. The struggle was much more real to him than his father or the buggy in which he was seated or the horse contentedly jogging along the highway. For the moment the pain of humiliation was gone. He had completely forgotten the scene in the tent. Like Christian, Teunis was besting his adversary, and he saw the streams of blood gushing from the devil's tough, leathery-skinned body!

Arrived home he came out of his dream with a start. Foppe had ceased speaking. The boy rubbed his eyes when the horse stopped. He ran into the kitchen and Vrouw Spykhoven folded him in her pitying arms. But she wondered afterwards why his eyes had flashed and why his whole body had quivered as it always did when he had fought another boy on his way home from school. How could she know that he had just come out victorious in a furious encounter with the devil?

"It's queer," often lamented Foppe Spykhoven, "how boys will quick learn all kinds of

vain songs and such, but the Catechism you can't get into them. The sinfulness of the human heart crops out everywhere. You can plain see it in this as in everything else."

Had he only known, Foppe would have found still other reasons for this perversity of the heart of his boy than inborn sin. But of what Teunis was reading Foppe for a long time remained in blissful ignorance.

There was "The Swiss Family Robinson," for instance, and a complete edition of "Robinson Crusoe" and "Treasure Island," and numerous other classics which Foppe did not know so much as by name. They were carefully concealed in the barn on a shelf formed by the eaves—a discovery of Teunis's on an egg-hunting expedition. To this he often climbed, almost at the peril of his life, to snatch a moment of unalloyed bliss. And during all the years from his seventh birthday until he was nearly twelve, his father did not discover the boy's dissipation in *verderfelijke* literature. It was on his seventh birthday that Klaas Quant gave him "The Swiss Family Robinson," and from time to time treasures were added to the collection through the medium of the peddler.

Klaas Quant brought the book with him in

his pack. He called attention to the curious coincidence of his presence on the Spykhoven farm with the anniversary, and he winked at Vrouw Spykhoven understandingly. In the morning he opened his pack as usual and produced the treasure. Teunis clutched it eagerly, a world of gratitude shining from his eyes.

Vrouw Spykhoven looked dubious. She handled the volume clumsily, as one does who is not used to the feel of books.

"I'm afraid your father won't like it," she doubted; "it looks like such a *story*."

Teunis clutched his treasure fiercely.

Foppe did not like it. In fact he reproached Tante Sarah for having entertained even for a moment the thought of letting the boy keep the book.

"It is such a novel," he scolded angrily. "Isn't there enough sinfulness in the heart of the boy without that!"

When next Klaas Quant came, Foppe handed the book back to him. But meanwhile Teunis had had time to lay his plans. When the peddler finally left and had gone on his way a half a mile or more the boy ran after his friend. Breathlessly overtaking him, he begged for the book.

"But your father doesn't want you to have it." Klaas Quant unexpectedly had a forbidding look.

Teunis did not answer. Had he miscalculated after all? The book was much more precious to him than it would have been had it not been forbidden. He would have been willing to fight the devil and all the hosts which that interesting adversary could summon if only after the battle the book would come to him as the prize of victory.

Klaas Quant read something of all this in the face of the boy. Opening his pack without another word he held out the volume. Teunis eagerly seized it, and, forgetting to thank the peddler, he hid it under his blouse and trotted homeward.

"Poor little devil!" exclaimed the peddler. . . .

That was the beginning. In time Klaas Quant brought him "David Copperfield" from De Stad, and "Ivanhoe," and "The Leatherstocking Tales," and numerous other soul-destroying books. The time came when Teunis asked for specific works. He conned the advertisements in the backs of some of the volumes for other books. As the years passed he gained something

of an education in literature, rambling though his reading was. And I have a notion that he gained more from those kindred spirits of his than I myself should have gained at the same age. But I had been letter-perfect in my "Kort Begrip" and the Heidelberg Catechism, while Teunis never gained much proficiency in them.

So the years passed until he was twelve. And then a joy came into Teunis's life compared with which all other joys faded into mere shadows. For two years he had longed for a Shakespeare. He had come across excerpts from him in the headings of chapters of "Ivanhoe," and his imagination had clothed the poet in glory. He had built playlets of his own about the figures of Richard III and Macbeth and Lear and Hamlet. The characters haunted him. He dreamed about them asleep and awake. He thought of them while mechanically repeating to his father the answers from the "Kort Begrip." They were more real to him than his mother, more real than the food he ate. He longed for the book that would give him the plays, but he had not dared to ask Klaas Quant for it. A volume so precious must cost a great deal of money. He had scruples about imposing on the generosity of the peddler.

When, therefore, on the boy's twelfth birthday Klaas Quant brought a one-volume Shakespeare, Teunis felt himself lifted up into the seventh heaven—or whichever is the highest heaven. There could be no joy beyond that. Now he could say that he had tasted real happiness. No matter when he should die now, he had had his fling at life. He had extracted the quintessence of joy from it. He had caught the Blue Bird and had caged it in his soul!

It was because he failed to repeat with perfect accuracy the answer in the Ninth Lord's Day of the Catechism that his joy was changed into tragedy—tragedy so soul-crushing and leaving behind a woe so unspeakably terrible that even the sorrows of the storm-beaten Lear paled in comparison with it.

Suspicion had for some reason flashed upon Foppe Spykhoven. The boy's failure in the Catechism determined the father to investigate. Perhaps it was excess of joy that made Teunis less careful than usual. Perhaps it was his unbridled eagerness to get back to "The Merchant of Venice" of which he was in the middle. He hurried away to the barn by a direct route instead of taking the precaution to approach it by a roundabout path, as had been his usual custom.

Foppe found him there, and the damning volume—*verderfelijke* literature—was in his hands!

The old man was menacingly calm as the two walked along the gravel path from barn to house.

Before the eyes of the father, before the eyes of his mother, in the cheerful kitchen where a moment before he had stood repeating stammeringly the words of the Catechism—that was the scene of the boy's humiliation. And the sharpest pain lay in this, that he was compelled to desecrate his divinity with his own hands. That beautiful volume, brought so recently from De Stad, with its frontispiece picture of the bust of Shakespeare under which the boy had written, "Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child," having found the Miltonic line in a school-book—that volume he must destroy with his own hands. He saw himself tearing out page after page and putting it in the kitchen stove. And when finally the covers themselves had been consumed a horror came upon Teunis such as he was seldom to feel again.

The next day, being Saturday, was "Catechism morning," and when the others were dismissed the gray-haired minister asked Teunis to remain. And the verbal chastisement the boy received was worse than any physical punish-

ment his father had ever inflicted. He answered not a word, but raged inwardly. And as soon as he had left the building, remembering Oom Jo, he said "Damn! Damn! Damn!" with a passion that left no doubt as to why he employed the expletive. Then he took his Heidelberg Catechism and tore it into shreds. He threw the pages on the ground and stamped on them passionately!

I had by this time risen to the position of head of the Latin department of Christian College. It was not Teunis who told me the story of the rape of Shakespeare; I realized with an ache of the heart that he did not like me and wouldn't dream of confiding in me. Tante Sarah described the scene to me, choking with pity for the boy. I made an entry about it in my diary that lies before me now:

If only his mother had lived! She would to-day be at the height of her powers. What a wonderful Ophelia she would have been! And better still, what a wonderful mother she would have proved herself! And the boy would be learning his Shakespeare from her instead of reading him surreptitiously in the hay-mow in Foppe Spykhoven's barn. What is my responsibility? I wonder.

Poor futile savant that I was, this was the only way I had of giving vent to my intimate thoughts—writing them down in a notebook!

CHAPTER VII

THE "lake horror" was a tradition in East Nassau, a tradition that stayed with the people because the principal actor in the ancient tragedy lived among them. Though most of the farms of the East Nassau folk were almost within sound of the water, separated from it only by a wall-like range of high sand-dunes, the community as a rule paid scant attention to things maritime. The Island, separated a mile and a quarter from the dunes by open lake, furnished a summer retreat for a score or two of resorters from Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and even a family or two from Cincinnati. But the Island might as well have been a thousand miles away for all the attention East Nassau paid to it. It was foreign territory and the people who lived there a month or two each year were "queer." They were covertly laughed at by East Nassau even more than East Nassau was laughed at by such of them as ever passed the range of dunes.

And the "lake horror" of a dozen or so years ago would have made no impression on East

Nassau, even though it had happened almost opposite the place a few miles into the open lake, if Parker Irving had not sought out the quiet Dutch community as a sort of "city of refuge" from the persecution he was subjected to in De Stad. He came in the hope that these simple farmers, many of whom had been his customers when he was a successful produce merchant, would believe his protestation, uttered passionately, that he had not thrown Israel Klein overboard. He needed desperately the belief of men in his innocence. No matter that the jury had not convicted him; he needed more than this negative vindication. And so he came to East Nassau to take up the trade he had learned in boyhood—making wooden shoes. The tragedy had ruined his business in De Stad, anyway, to say nothing of its having killed his young wife and her unborn baby, and he had been too dazed by the catastrophe to do aught else but hide.

But East Nassau, though roughly kind to the stricken man and his little daughter Esther, was of a mind with De Stad in believing in his guilt. All the more so because Parker Irving, though admittedly he had been on the deck of the *Soo City* when the wealthy Jew met with

foul play, could advance no explanation of the tragedy. He had been asleep in his chair, he maintained!

And instead of the rehabilitation that he had dreamed of finding in East Nassau the years had brought him pariahdom.

"*Ja*, he's a little *mal*," said East Nassau; and little boys and little girls passed his low house with trepidation, holding their breath. To them there was something sinister about it. The large elm that laid the beautiful curves of its branches over the low roof, the stark nakedness of the yard, innocent as it was of shrub and flower, the cavernous gloom of the shed in which Irving had his workshop—all contributed to the popular notion that the very place was a little *mal*.

So Esther was early made to feel her apartness. When still a very small girl she began to share the pariahdom of her father. She rebelled against it passionately, but it was like rebelling against a law of nature. The little girls of her own age never entered her yard. What could she do against their fear of the place, against their dread of encountering the "wooden-shoe man"? They were not the least bit backward in making it bluntly plain that there was something wrong with her and with her life and with everything

that pertained to her. She and her father lived in East Nassau, but they were not of East Nassau.

In her impotent despair she sometimes wished passionately that she were a little Dutch girl like the others; but such moments were of short duration. Always after such a wish she immediately repudiated it with a gleam of the eye of which she was wholly unconscious.

It was Teunis Spykhoven, though a little younger than Esther, who made the daring proposal that she give a "real grown-up party." It staggered the twelve-year-old school-girl, but also it fascinated her. There could be no real obstacles. Her father would raise no objections, and Teunis confidently assured her the older boys and girls wouldn't be afraid to come.

Heaven alone knows why Teunis concocted the scheme, unless it was that his own comparative isolation in East Nassau made him understand Esther's loneliness. He engineered the project; he invited the guests, ranging in age from fifteen to nineteen; it was he who helped Esther to build out of defeat and despair a splendid triumph. To be hostess at twelve to a "grown-up party" was no small achievement. The little girl's feet involuntarily danced and

her eyes gleamed as she examined herself in the mirror an hour before the event. . . .

At seven o'clock the boys came slouching in, singly and in groups. They shyly ranged themselves along the wall and had little to say. Added to their usual discomfort under unusual circumstances was the feeling that they were in the house of the "wooden-shoe man." Their ill-fitting clothes sat strangely upon them, and their celluloid collars made them painfully aware of a feeling of formality and constraint.

The girls were more at ease from the beginning. Not that they did not feel the strangeness of being finally in the "wooden-shoe man's" house. But they shook off this feeling soon. Each was too much occupied with wondering what effect would be produced by her print dress to give much attention to Parker Irving and his oddities.

The boys grouped themselves at one end of the room; the girls at the other. It was always thus until the ice was broken. A sly glance here and there from girl to boy and from boy to girl, a remark spoken in general to nobody in particular, a laugh answered by another laugh from the other group, light badinage accompanied by a kind of shuffling mass movement

of the two groups toward each other; a bolder spirit than the rest in each group breaking from the ranks—such was the beginning of the party.

And then they played the old, old games which I myself played when I was a lank-limbed youth in East Nassau and which I have no doubt the boys and girls of to-day are playing there now. They played, for instance, that old, old game which never loses its charm in East Nassau, known as "There sits a bold commander." Only the boys and girls of East Nassau made free use of elision and sang it something like this, "There siz a bo commander." Lustily and vigorously, red of face and perspiring freely, they sang it over and over again:

"There sits a bold commander,
Brave as Alexander,
Home from the battle that was fought last year;
Then arise upon your feet
And kiss the first you meet,
For there're many that are longing for a chair,
chair, chair."

They sang it circling around two chairs, youth and maiden alternating, hand clasping hand, the chairs occupied by a boy and a girl. When the singers reached the words, "Then arise upon your feet," the pair who formed the hub of the wheel obediently arose and shyly kissed

each other. Then the lad sallied forth to choose his lass in the singing, tripping, perspiring circle on whom to bestow a similar salute, and his partner of the hub went to choose a boy. These thus singled out thereupon sat down on the chairs, and the song began again.

Or there was that other, if possible, still greater favorite, "Ole Man Tucker":

"Ole man Tucker went to town
And swung the ladies all aroun',
He swung one right and he swung one left,
He swung the ones that he loved best;
Get out the way for ole man Tucker,
He's too late to get his supper,
Ole man Tucker went to town . . ."

and so on and so on over and over again, boys swinging girls at the proper moment when the words of the song called for it.

And they played "Post-Office," and "Clap In, Clap Out," and "Wink," and any one of a dozen other games that have become classics in East Nassau. There was a good deal of shy love-making under the guise of playing games; it is just such good old games that have helped build homes in East Nassau (and all the world over for that matter) for many generations.

But Esther was not thinking of love-making. She knew only that here was excitement and

color and merriment. Her eyes danced and her feet danced also. She couldn't keep them still. She was flooded with joy. It filled her, bubbling up irresistibly. It sang in her blood and flushed her cheeks. There was no longer any East Nassau; there was only a land of enchantment.

This was *her* party. She caught herself thinking of that as she circled around and around with the others and sang the old, old songs. *Her* party. In that lay all the difference. Tonight in this house she was not an alien, a girl whose father had lost caste. They were taking *her* refreshments, playing games in *her* house. Oh, it was all suddenly different. She was not only one of them; she was *the* one. In short, it was *her* party. . . .

Sandwiches and chocolate and cake and apples, and the games began again, more vigorously because of the short rest. They were pursuing the joy of life, these boys and girls of East Nassau. . . .

Parker Irving sat in another room finishing a pair of wooden shoes which he had begun late that afternoon. But the work did not prosper. He sat staring at the block of wood on his lap, his hands forgetting to do their appointed task.

The sound of the two dozen voices in the dining-room filled the kitchen where Parker Irving was working. And the revelry caused a strange wistfulness to awaken in him. His heart had been dead for many years, but the songs stirred at least the ashes that remained from the burnt-out life.

They had been the games of his youth, many of them, and they gave him a strange exhilaration. For many years he had felt himself a very old, old man, but the sound of revelry in the other room somehow brought back his youth. He remembered with a shock that he was not yet forty years old.

He clinched his fists involuntarily. What had he done to deserve his fate?

Parker Irving had never attended church in East Nassau. He did not understand the Dutch services; he did not even know what the eternal war between the "new" church and the "true" church was about. Moreover, he did not care to go to church. Gradually as the years had passed, a kind of resentment had grown up in him against all things religious.

"They would say," he thought, "that I was bein' punished for my sins."

He laughed a cynical laugh—"my sins!"

He recalled his boyhood's picture of God: a man infinitely large, with a long white beard, sitting on a bank of cloud, watching the minutest movement of the minutest creature.

Again he laughed aloud. Parker Irving had done a great deal of thinking during those silent years. He had rebuilt many a mental image which he might not have rebuilt if his life had been smooth and easy.

The old, old songs from the two dozen throats in the other room reawakened something in the lonely man. They aroused once more the forgotten passion of revolt. Long ago he had given up; but somehow "Ole Man Tucker" and all the other familiar songs told him that he had given up too soon. He would make another stand—one more fight.

"Queer I never thought of that before," he mused half aloud; "it's the children I've got to work on. They can't hold out against me. They don't know anything about the circumstances. It happened when they were babies. Why didn't I think of that before?"

He sat staring at the wall for a while. Then, before he knew clearly what he was about, he had opened the door that led into the dining-room.

The merry-makers were in the middle of "Ole Man Tucker." The laughter suddenly died out of the eyes of Esther when she saw her father's haggard face in the doorway.

The prematurely old man waited until the players came to the last line; then he held up his hand for silence.

"Father!" whispered Esther in protest, but he waved her aside. A deathlike stillness settled upon the company.

"I ain't goin' to interfere with your playin'," he said, and to the boys and girls of East Nassau his voice sounded sepulchral; "but seein' that you must be ready for a little recess I thought I'd tell you a few things which it will be good for all of you to know. As you know, I'm the man they say killed Israel Klein—"

"Father!" once more protested Esther, a half-sob choking her voice; but once more he waved her aside.

"They say it only because they don't know the facts. There's nothin' like knowin' the facts of a thing. I've been thinkin' to-night it wouldn't be right to leave you young people in ignorance of the real facts. It wouldn't be fair to you, seein' you was babies when it all happened."

Several of the girls in the room looked about

them in fear. The older boys braced themselves for an emergency. Suppose the man should become violent! There was real fear in the hearts of all of them.

But Parker Irving was perfectly sane. It was only on this one point that he was a little *mal*. It made him forget the impression he was creating.

"And now you are grown up and must think for yourselves," he continued in a dispassionate, even voice.

And forgetting that the interruption was becoming more than a moment, that it was stretching itself into many minutes, he told the story of the fatal night on the Soo City. He told it coherently and simply, his voice only occasionally sounding the hysterical note that had marked the recital of the earlier years.

"And now I beg you to continue your games," he concluded. "I didn't mean to interrupt them long, but I know you'll be glad to be correctly informed."

And bowing to the assembled company he passed into the kitchen.

"Yes, let's start up again," said Esther in a desperate attempt to give an air of casualness to the episode. But the misery in her heart was

so intense that the simple words sounded like a cry of despair.

No one moved to follow her invitation. The silence in the room was deathlike.

"It's time to go 'ome," suggested one girl.

"*Ja*, that's what I've been thinkin'," another seconded her.

There was a chorus of assent. The sound of their own voices gave the boys and girls courage, and here and there one giggled almost defiantly. There was a rush for coats and hats, and ten minutes later the room was empty, save for Esther and Teunis Spykhoven.

The boy stood bashfully fingering a large red apple he had absently picked up from the table. He stood looking down on Esther's misery understandingly. Somehow he felt himself responsible; the whole thing had been in a way his scheme.

"I thought maybe I could help you straighten up," he ventured with curious timidity.

Esther looked up.

"No," she said, and her eyes were hard — with the hardness of the adult.

"They're a bunch of silly fools." Teunis had all the contemptuous intolerance of boyhood.

Esther gave no sign that she heard him.

Suddenly she got up from her chair and that unconscious gleam of determination flashed into her eyes.

"I'll show 'em!" she cried passionately; "I'll show 'em!"

Teunis could not know that she was thinking of the distant future. Neither did Esther know that something had been born in her this night that would affect profoundly her whole life.

CHAPTER VIII

ALREADY at this time I was being spoken of in connection with the presidency of Christian College. In the course of nature old Dr. Steenman would either die or become superannuated, and I had decided years ago, before any one else thought of such a thing, that I would be his successor. I had built my fences carefully. And now others were beginning to support my ambition. More than once I had censored an address with unsparing severity, hacking out whole paragraphs which the spontaneous fervor of composition had produced, but which my calmer judgment told me the constituency of the college would not expect from a future president. Moments of revolt were not lacking when for very shame I restored the offending sentences to the manuscript or even made their original meaning more passionately emphatic. But this was rare, and candor compels me to set down the humiliating fact that there were times when in the delivery I turned coward at the last, cautiously deleting once more what had been restored to the manuscript with so much in-

ward struggle. In short, I meant to be president of Christian College whether or no.

The fact of my being unmarried was, of course, against me, and I had to be all the more circumspect to overcome this handicap. A bachelor at the head of the college seemed almost as much of an anomaly to the men whose money and sons and daughters kept the institution going as a *juffrou*-less minister in a parsonage. I could imagine, for instance, the East Nassau farmers raising their eyes at the suggestion. The prize was not by any means mine for the taking.

I cultivated East Nassau sedulously. The "True Church," as our denomination was jeeringly called, was strong there, and I saw clearly that it would not be without influence on the final decision. Each summer I spent much time convincing fathers that their sons who were done with the grades should enter the "Preparatory Department" of the college, and my success as a student recruiting agent, not only in East Nassau, but throughout the denomination's normal territory, was such that the long-hoped-for notion finally gained some currency that I might be available timber as a successor to Dr. Steenman.

When Teunis Spykhoven and Kees Boerma left the grammar school I had but little difficulty in persuading their parents that it was their "Christian duty" to send the boys to "our college" in De Stad. With Kees there was no difficulty whatsoever. Jan Boerma, his father, had always intended that the boy should be "led up" to the ministry.

Foppe Spykhoven had misgivings about Teunis. The discovery of the boy's surreptitious reading of the forbidden Shakespeare in the hayloft came not long before the decision had to be made, and the almost universal prediction in East Nassau that not much of anything was to be expected of such a one made Foppe waver in his intention of making a minister out of Teunis.

"I'd keep him on the farm," counseled Jan Boerma, who naturally was called into consultation; "far as I can see, that's all he's good for."

A dangerous light leaped into Tante Sarah's eyes. But Foppe considered the advice dispassionately.

"*Ja, ja*, maybe you're right—maybe."

"Look at Kees now: him I can send to Christian College with a clear conscience. He's got the makings of something in him."

Though all the facts were against her, Tante

Sarah made a desperate stand for her boy. For the moment she hated the very virtues of her sister's model son.

"Teunis is good at heart; he don't mean to be bad."

But Foppe ignored his wife's defense.

"It's hard to know what's best, Jan. I must keep a sharp eye on him, that's one sure thing."

"That you must; if it was my Kees now!"

Tante Sarah glared at her brother-in-law almost jealously.

Foppe merely sighed.

"If I was only educated myself, now, I could teach him at home."

"*Ja*, Foppe, but we're only simple farmers," said Tante Sarah humbly.

Her husband took offense at the tone.

"But I could teach him a lot in the Bible," he said proudly; "but—there is that Latin and Greek!" He sighed again.

It was decided that I was to take the boy under my special supervision. What could be more appropriate? I had known his mother, "such an actress," as Foppe always phrased it, and I would know better than any one else how to guard against the wayward tendencies in his nature.

The charge was distasteful to me in the

extreme, but I had no choice. To become the watch-dog over any one, and especially over Teunis Spykhoven—I had little inclination for the job. But in an unlucky moment I gave my solemn promise to Foppe Spykhoven and Tante Sarah that I would watch over the boy whom twelve years ago I had committed to their care. I little understood that in assuming the charge I was picking up a thread that would snarl the skein of my life.

It was from a casual remark of Teunis's a month or two after the semester had opened that I learned I had overlooked an opportunity as a recruiting agent for the college in not seeing in Esther Irving a prospect. I had considered the "wooden-shoe man" too poor to be able to give his daughter an education. But the girl was attending the high school in Nassau, nearly three miles distant from East Nassau. She walked that distance every morning and evening, I understood from Teunis, and in addition to carrying more than the curriculum demanded she kept house for her father. And she was less than thirteen!

Here was a prospect not to be lightly neglected. I wrote to her. Christian College offered

many opportunities to an ambitious student, and the moral advantages of an education in a religious institution were worth considering. It was the usual patter with which I caught parents of boys and girls, and I was not conscious of the insincerity of the sentences while writing them.

By return mail an answer came. I think I can give it almost verbatim after the lapse of the years:

DEAR SIR:

I received your letter. I would enter Christian College if I could gain anything by it. Will you kindly answer the following: (1) Would I be likely to earn more money if I should graduate from your Preparatory Department than from the Nassau high school? (2) Would a diploma from your school give me a better standing in society than a diploma from the Nassau high school?

If you can answer "Yes" to both of these questions, and if you can convince me that what you say is true, I shall come to Christian College. ,

Very truly yours

ESTHER MARIE IRVING

The letter took my breath away. I read it again and then again. Inclined at first to smile, the desire left me and was replaced by an uncomfortable sense of sheepishness as I thought of my own hollow, patronizing letter. This little

school-girl had seen through me; my cheeks actually burned.

I went to see her. Her little hand gripped mine with an unmistakable air of decision. Also she plainly betrayed the fact that she had no time to squander on inessentials. But I lamely tried to place the case before her in hackneyed phrases about the advantages of a "Christian education." Such phrases had become second nature to me, and never had I been conscious of their hollowness as uttered by me until that moment. The little school-girl waved it all aside.

"I don't care anything about that.—You got my letter?"

Disconcerted I admitted that I had.

"Well?" She stood waiting for a categorical answer evidently.

"But my dear child, you are laboring under a strange misapprehension. That isn't what an education is for—money and a place in society."

Her answer was explosive with decision.

"It is—for me!"

I didn't know what to make of it and I didn't know what to say. Never in all my experience had I confronted any situation like it. Never before had my pious phrases been

taken for anything but coin of the realm. And here was a girl, a mere child, who did not even pay them the compliment of denying them. They did not exist for her; they had no importance; they were like the irrelevant talk of an infant. My cheeks burned again in spite of all my efforts at feeling superior and amused.

I could not, of course, honestly answer her two ticketed questions with categorical affirmatives, so I hedged and tried to drag in side issues. She listened respectfully for a little. Then she came back to the point.

"But you can't say 'yes' to my questions?"

"My dear child—"

"But that's all I wanted to know, Mr. Bakkerzeel." There was actually a suggestion of dismissal in the words!

But it was not until I was back in my bachelor's quarters in De Stad that I came to a full realization of the fact that this little school-girl had dominated the interview. And when later in the day I tried to censor an address which I was to deliver the following week, I had no stomach for the task. A little girl with determined gray eyes seemed to withhold my hand from cutting out of the manuscript the only sentences that had real life-blood in them.

CHAPTER IX

FOR several months Teunis Spykhoven gave me no trouble. As a student he was more brilliant than industrious, and he accepted zero marks in daily recitations with an equanimity that was the despair of the faculty members. It seemed impossible for him to force himself into the neat educational moulds into which all students were squeezed whether they would or no. At Christian College education was practically synonymous with linguistic attainment, and he who could not win high marks in Latin and Greek was a poor student. In my own department, with the best will in the world — Heaven knows I passionately desired Teunis to be successful — I was barely able to give him passing marks; but though he paid but scant attention to the Latin as a language, the boy soon knew more about Roman literature than all the other members of the class combined.

And this was even more true of his Greek. Greek tragedy in particular gripped him. He actually committed a metrical translation of the "Œdipus Tyrannus" to memory, thereby

winning the amused contempt of his cousin Kees Boerma, who could see no sense in doing work outside the curriculum that did not lead to grades. It was not until years afterwards that Teunis showed me a tragedy of his own on the Greek model written at this time. But this also Kees would have laughed at had he known about it. What could it bring Teunis?

And neither Kees nor I knew that much of the time which he was supposed to be putting on Latin and Greek, Teunis wasted in haunting the entrances of the theaters of De Stad. The play-houses had a fatal attraction to him that he could not overcome. He had never been inside one of them, and I should not have understood at the time the passionate longing that tore him to cross the forbidden portals.

And then it was Kees who proposed going to a play! Teunis's heart jumped. Kees!

Sir Henry Irving was to fill a one-night's engagement at the Temple, and Teunis could not know that Kees also had been tempted by the lure of the footlights. Not that he had any of the instincts that tortured Teunis, but for one thing the theater was forbidden territory, and Kees was human—and young.

He felt his cousin out cautiously, obviously

with a view of halving responsibility in case of detection. But Teunis saw his drift, and his pulse beat more violently. For Kees was not under a cloud.

"We're studying 'Hamlet' right now in class," Kees ventured.

Teunis considered it safer, on the whole, not to take the initiative.

"Is that what Irving's going to give?" The young hypocrite knew but too well.

"For Heaven's sake, you're always reading the newspapers and you didn't see that!"

Teunis saved himself from the sin of fibbing by preserving a discreet silence. But a moment later his hypocrisy took on a still deeper dye.

"He's quite an actor this—this—what's his name—Irvig?"

"The 'Post' says he's not only a very great actor, but a very great man."

Teunis laughed in spite of himself. It was clear that Kees had no conception of the greatness of the great English actor. To Teunis, Irving was a definite personality, as definite, for instance, as his queer bookish friend, Klaas Quant the peddler. To Kees he was only a name that had suddenly been brought into sharp relief by theater press notices in the "Evening

Post." And for a moment the Puritan in Kees asserted itself.

"But I wonder if the newspapers don't hide a good many things about these actors; they're so frightfully commercial—the newspapers. It hardly seems likely that a man with so much character as this Irving is described as having should be in the business of acting."

Teunis's heart sank. Had he been mistaken about Kees's motives? But there was reassurance in the very next words.

"Still it might help to understand 'Hamlet'; wonder if it wouldn't help?"

"What?" Teunis plunged deeper into hypocrisy.

"Why, to—to see Irving give it," Kees stammered, his cheeks burning, but a certain defiance in his eyes.

Teunis simulated astonishment.

"Go to the Temple!" It was an awed whisper.

Kees answered him in that same conspirator's tone.

"To the Temple!" Then, in mitigation of the sin, he added, "To *study* the play."

Teunis did not commit himself, and Kees was not the boy to come to a quick decision. The battle in his soul continued for several days.

Again and again he returned to the subject. Day after day he discussed the for and against of going to see "Hamlet" at the Temple. And Teunis, seeing him approach nearer the flame, discreetly kept his peace. He even took the risk of mildly opposing his cousin, shrewdly guessing that opposition might stimulate desire.

And on the night of the play the cousins were there, occupying front seats in the third gallery. . . .

In Teunis the scene induced a subtle intoxication. It dazzled him and went to his head like wine. Here was life and illusion. He straightway lost all sense of time and place. The centuries rolled back and he was in Denmark.

But to Kees a sense of time and place was very much present. Hardly had he settled down in his seat when his fears began to attack him. Suppose some one from East Nassau had seen him entering the theater! Or suppose some one should see them there who should mention the fact to some one else, who in turn might mention it to some one else, and so on! As he thought of it now he became certain that it must get to the ears of East Nassau.

"And you joined the church only eight months ago," an accusing voice seemed to say.

Perspiration stood on Kees's forehead. His hands trembled as he held the programme.

He tried to concentrate his mind on the stage. The ghost of Hamlet's father walked the boards, and Kees noticed in the semi-darkness that the eyes of Teunis were shining like two stars. Teunis did not know he was in a theater. He did not know Kees was sitting next to him.

But concentration was impossible for Kees. He shivered. As the play advanced he worked himself up into a fever until at the last curtain he was in agony.

And it was Klaas Quant's unhappy fate to make those fears take a still more definite shape. The queer, bookish peddler had an old-fashioned liking for "Hamlet"; he belonged to the school that was brought up on the Bible and Shakespeare, and he seldom missed an opportunity to see his favorite writer played. After the performance he met his boy friends in the lobby and stopped to shake hands with them.

Kees could not hide his agitation, but the peddler did not notice it. He soon turned away to another friend.

"Klaas Quant—here!"

Teunis did not grasp at first what his cousin meant. He was still walking in a dream-world.

"I knew he was in town," he mumbled absently; "saw him yesterday."

"But *here*, at the theater!"

Then Teunis began to see what Kees meant—that the exclamation was one of fear. "Oh, that's all right; old Klaas Quant's all right."

"But he's likely to visit East Nassau; he's likely to let it out even if he don't mean to."

"Nonsense! He was there himself, and Klaas Quant's too good a business man to stroke East Nassau's fur the wrong way. To tell on us he'd have to admit he went himself."

This satisfied Kees for a moment, but his fears returned. All night he couldn't sleep. And though it was only the middle of the week, he boarded the interurban car for home the next day. It would be better to tell the story himself.

Kees's plan was gloriously successful, more successful than he had dared to hope. In the course of his confession one of his parents suggested that, of course, Kees had entered the play-house to become acquainted with it at first hand—to be able to fight evil more effectively later on, much in the same way as he might study the opinions of heretical writers to be able to combat them. And Kees jumped at the wonderful excuse.

He returned to De Stad light-hearted. When he told Teunis that "old Klaas Quant" (he was sufficiently contemptuous now) could do no more harm, Teunis looked troubled.

"So that's what you were in such a sweat to get home for?"

"Thought I might as well get ahead of the old geezer."

"Oh, damn!" Teunis had retained a certain fondness for his Oom Jo's favorite oath.

Kees was shocked. But Teunis paid no attention to his protests.

"You saved your own skin," he exploded angrily, "but what about me?"

That was something Kees had not taken into consideration. But he consoled himself later by arguing that, after all, he was not responsible for Teunis's conduct. In fact, he almost made himself believe that Teunis had in some subtle way helped to lure him into the place. . . .

When he arrived at home on Saturday Teunis was prepared for a storm. He was not surprised when his father met him with the semi-interrogatory, semi-protesting, "*Nu!*"

"You've heard all about it, I suppose." Teunis was resigned to a scene.

Suddenly he saw what looked like a gleam of

hope in the eyes of his father. And because of Kees's story he guessed what the basis of that hope was. For a wild moment he was tempted, but instantly he saw that it would be useless. Not so much because of scruples of conscience, but he knew it would be impossible for him to keep up the pose. He knew he couldn't do it convincingly.

"No," he said, shaking his head as if in answer to a question.

Then he hesitated. Could he make his father understand? But the misery in the old man's eyes showed him that it would be useless to try. Foppe Spykhoven stood tongue-tied.

"But you won't do it again," Vrouw Spykhoven pleaded.

If Foppe had not spoken before the boy could answer, Teunis would have made a rash promise never to enter a play-house again. The appeal in his mother's voice was too much for him.

"You're tempting the devil!" Foppe thundered, finding his voice at last. "I should think you're old enough to know that. Time and again I've pointed out that you must be specially careful. It's in your blood—your mother such an actress!"

He said it in vigorous Dutch and the contempt in the old man's voice was withering.

Teunis flared up.

"And all the better for it—for being such an actress!" he shouted, his eyes burning.

Foppe Spykhoven reeled as if he had received a blow. Tante Sarah's visible distress prevented the boy from saying more. . . .

Teunis's refusal to take advantage of Kees's wonderful excuse for entering the theater shamed me into an attempt to defend him. I had a swift vision of his mother looking at me with contempt in her eyes, and I forced myself to brave Foppe Spykhoven's displeasure.

But I might have known that the attempt would be futile.

"Not a sin!" the old man thundered; "not a sin to go to such an opera-house!" Astonished consternation robbed him of further speech.

Prudence came back to me and I tried to modify the statement; but nothing short of a flat denial of what I had said would satisfy Foppe Spykhoven. And that I could not bring myself to give, even if the presidency of ten colleges had depended on it. There was some manhood left in me.

But I knew that East Nassau was shaking its

head and I knew that I should have to rebuild a great many fences before I could hope to win back my old-time prestige.

And such a queer mixture are we average humans of disinterested and selfish motives that I never for a moment doubted but that the fences must be rebuilt. True, a breath from heaven had seemed to enter me the moment I had broken them down, but a man has his life to live upon the earth, and in broad daylight heaven is a far-away place, no matter how near it may seem in the darkness of a lonely room.

CHAPTER X

You are wondering probably how an old duffer like me, much given at this time to the study of the Latin irregular verb, knows so much about the lives of these young people. How can I be expected to know, for instance, what passed that autumn afternoon between Teunis Spykhoven and Esther Irving on the Island, with the big elm trees casting their shade even to where they were sitting in the sand on the beach, with the smoke curling up from the kitchen chimneys of the summer cottages in the near distance? If you will only exercise a little patience, the how of my intimate knowledge will appear in due season. I am only a faded Latin professor who claims no special knowledge of the lives of others, and it is possible that much was said that afternoon by those two youngsters which I have never learned. But I feel free to vouch for what I shall here set down.

The Island could easily be seen from the sand-dunes that skirted the farms of East Nassau. It was about a mile and a quarter from the mainland and in midsummer it was gay with

the life of the summer colony that each year repaired here to escape the heat of the city. But in these autumn days only a baker's half-dozen remained to watch the woods change from green to gold. A few weeks more and the place would be a Crusoe abode without even its Crusoe.

Teunis in his boy way was a little in love with Esther, but the girl, with the confidence of seventeen, laughed at him.

"You're going to be famous, of course, and do something big and get your picture into the newspapers and magazines."

Teunis took refuge in a sheepish grin. He had not counted on her turning what he had been saying into ridicule. Of course he meant to be famous and he meant to do something big, but he had merely hinted at it.

She turned on him suddenly, passing in one of her lightning changes from mockery to gravity:

"How?"

Teunis was bewildered. "How what?" he stammered.

"How are you going to get famous?"

Teunis didn't know. Esther's even teeth snapped together.

"If I was a man I'd make up my mind what I was going to do."

Here was a strange, alien Esther. Teunis didn't quite know what to make of her. He attempted badinage.

"But being a woman, naturally all you need to do is wait for a husband." She would put in a vehement disclaimer as he had observed all girls at this age did when the subject of possible marriage came up. She surprised him once more.

"That depends," she said firmly.

"Depends?"

There was not the slightest hesitation in Esther's answer; she spoke with the air of one who had gone to the heart of this question and had made up her mind definitely.

"On the man; I'll marry if a man asks me who can give me what I want!"

"And if not?"

"Then I'll get it for myself!" Her gray eyes were unnaturally hard for the moment and Teunis had a sense of talking to a stranger. Esther was not always thus.

"And you know what you want?" he ventured for the sake of saying something.

"I certainly do. For one thing, I want money."

Teunis was shocked into an attitude of rigid uprightness. That all young girls wanted to marry for love with no thought of money was so much a canon in the code of accepted things that Esther's frankness took his breath away. She guessed his astonishment.

"Oh, it's all well and good to talk about love in a cottage, but it's real dollars in the bank that gets you somewhere."

Teunis was beginning to see that Esther was not the least little bit in love with him.

"And where are you trying to get, if it isn't butting in too much to ask it of your ladyship?" He took refuge in gentle mockery.]

"Oh, laugh; it does no harm.—I don't mind telling you I'm trying to get where I would have been if all this hadn't happened—the lake horror and all that." In spite of the resoluteness of her eyes, her voice trembled a little. Into Teunis's mind flashed the scene of Esther's party when the "wooden-shoe man" broke ineptly into the merriment. Eyes downcast now, Esther went on, half to him, half to herself:

"My mother was somebody. She had ambitions for father and me, though I was too little then to realize it. Of course, he wasn't to blame, father wasn't. But what difference does that

make? People don't look at that. They would have, though, if he'd had money and position in society and standing. But he hadn't. He was just one of the strugglers; had it in him to win all, but hadn't won yet. You can talk all you please, but it was the want of money and social standing that killed my mother, that put father where he is."

Cynicism in a young girl affected Teunis disagreeably. It seemed somehow fitting that she should have had the usual illusions about life. He had them himself. He often told himself life was very beautiful, and he sincerely believed the phrase meant something. With an air of disregarding what he might think, Esther went on, in her firm monotone:

"So that's what I'm going after, money and standing." And then she indulged in a bit of cynical philosophy unnatural to her years: "And it's the former that gives the latter!"

It was a subject to which Teunis had never given so much as a thought. Money did not exist for him, except when he was desperately in need of it, as he often was, for he was an imprudent spender. He had never thought of it as having anything to do with life. And standing in society! That it could make any differ-

ence to any one what any or all, except a few one cared for personally, thought of one was incomprehensible to him. Esther wheeled on him before he could frame his dissent in words.

"And what are *you* going to do?"

"Do?" Teunis collected his scattered wits with an effort.

"Well, *be*, then; what are you going to be? How are you going to make a living when you're through school?"

"Well, I—I really don't know," he stammered, confused. Making a living had so far somehow seemed irrelevant. He waved the idea aside with a vague gesture: "There's lots of things to work at."

Esther gave him a shrewd, worldly-wise look.

"But lots of things don't bring in anything. A person's got to settle down to something."

Teunis did not answer. Esther's phrase "settle down to something" had the effect of making him take stock. His father wanted him to be a minister. He shuddered. The very thought of it made him tingle with a distaste that was appalling in its intensity. That never! Mentally he underscored the word heavily. *Never!*

"Kees is going to be a professor—a professor

in ethics," Esther broke in on him. "He's got his mind made up; *he'll* get somewhere."

Teunis was conscious of a swift pang of jealousy. He would have given the world to be able to meet her challenge with a definite announcement, but he was unpleasantly conscious of the feeling that all possible professions were about equally distasteful. The thought of spending his life in a classroom as his cousin proposed doing was abhorrent, and as for the law and medicine and business—he would as lief die as give his life to any of them.

His mother had been an actress; a flush of real interest came into his face only to die out immediately. It was an alien, far-away life; it was out of the question. Even Esther, with all her curious catholicity of outlook, would have laughed at the notion. As for East Nassau! He smiled inwardly.

He simply couldn't see the importance of doing what he knew most people were doing. Much of it seemed curiously childish to him. Drilling the Latin verb into a score of boys and girls as I, old Kommer Bakkerzeel, for instance, was doing day after day—the thought of it filled Teunis Spykhoven with consuming amusement. Could there be anything more inane than

that? There would be more real fun in driving a garbage wagon!

There was something hard about Esther to-day, and Teunis felt uncomfortable. The tall elm trees on the Island, shot through with bars of autumn sunlight, gave the place a cathedral-like air. There was a majesty about them that lifted the boy up to them; they brought to his mind irrelevant phrases from the Dutch Bible about "lifting up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my deliverance." There were no hills here except the low sand-dunes across the water and there was no danger from which deliverance was necessary. But the memory of the words thrilled him for all that, giving him an acute sense of their importance. And the mysterious exultation they brought seemed infinitely more worth while than professions and careers and social standings. They were jarring notes all—out of tune with everything that was real. It was amazing that this girl who had been the companion of his boyhood adventures could sit there in a temple of nature's own building and talk about what she was going to be and what she was going to do. She was "hard."

But she surprised him when they were rowing away from the Island. The sun was filling the

western sky with flame. The tall elm trees were casting their long shadows over the water now. The woods were a splash of gold and green. The smoke curling in thin spirals from the cottage chimneys hung ghostlike in the air. Esther suddenly stretched out her arms to it—to all the haunting beauty they were leaving.

“Oh, it’s beautiful, Teunis—I love it all! It’s like a—it’s like a—” She struggled for a word—“like a temple.”

Teunis took a tighter grip on the oars and kept his eyes downcast.

CHAPTER XI

THE only time I ever heard Tante Sarah utter a vindictive word was when, according to East Nassau, Kees Boerma threatened to go wrong. It was *schandalig* everybody agreed, and the country-side blazed with animated gossip. Stung at last to reprisal by her sister's constant holding up of Teunis's faults as a foil to set off her own Kees's virtues, Tante Sarah met me with a queer little sarcastic smile that was wholly alien to her:

"If it was our Kees now," she mimicked her sister's smug pride in her virtuous son—"our Kees!"

I forgot my dignity. Tante Sarah's sarcasm was excruciatingly funny. And never had she given me so eloquent an idea of her love for Teunis and her resentment at her sister's family's constant depreciation of him.

Tante Sarah became grave instantly. "*Ja*, you can laugh, Kommer; Teunis isn't your boy; you can laugh, but I!"

Laughter died out of my heart with a sudden shock. "Oh, God!" is all I could think. Tante Sarah's eyes softened in a way that had made me

adore her way back in my boyhood bread-and-honey days when she was still a girl.

"I know, Kommer, you love him too," she hastened to add; "you couldn't help but do that; but I'm his mother—his mother!" She thus often insisted on her motherhood as if jealously guarding the rights which were hers by adoption only as they were other women's by nature.

I had not come to Tante Sarah to get at the real sentiment of East Nassau with regard to Kees. In spite of her moment of vindictiveness, I knew full well that she had too soft a heart to bear malice long, and she would soon be defending her nephew against the community. But the fact that she could indulge in it even for a moment showed me how East Nassau was wrought up.

And later Vrouw Hilman, who lived next door to Parker Irving, enlightened me further. She had no scruples about speaking her mind.

"Such an English girl!" she broke out as soon as Kees's name had been introduced (and she saw to its introduction almost as soon as greetings had been decently exchanged)—"Running round with such an English girl!"

"But they aren't all bad—English girls, Vrouw Hilman."

She sniffed and I experienced that uncomfortable feeling that always stole over me whenever I felt that a mental mark of discredit was being chalked up against me.

"And she goes on with them dances and such, and Kees upholds this—Kees what was so great when he joined the church, with his Greek words and all that!" She said it in idiomatic Dutch.

Until now I had not taken Kees's infatuation with Nathalie Villener seriously. Now and again curious bits of student comment had broken through to me, but I had not paid much attention to them. Kees did not particularly interest me and I was not anxious to set myself up as a guardian of his morals.

"And she plays in such a theater—plays the piano." Vrouw Hilman was fairly quivering with a sense of righteous outrage.

"But he's only a boy," I ventured in his defense—"how old is he—nineteen? Yes, he must be nineteen—Teunis is nearly that."

"Boy—only a boy! And if that's what they learn 'em in Christian College to go gadding about with loose women, then I'll keep my Johannes on the farm."

"Of course the college gets the blame." But I didn't say it aloud.

"There's talk of having him up before the consistory," Vrouw Hilman volunteered with a gusto that showed how intensely she would enjoy such an eventuality. "And they would, and right, too, if Jan Boerma wasn't an elder and wasn't keeping it back."

We were sitting in Vrouw Hilman's roomy and homelike kitchen, a part of the house in which it was customary for East Nassau housewives to entertain company. A huge coffee-pot stood singing on the stove, sending a delicious aroma through the room. The portly woman wore a neat white apron and she was busily engaged in knitting heavy red woolen socks for her husband. Her large gray cat with intensely blue eyes was lying near the stove eagerly watching the ball of yarn on the floor and ready to pounce on it as soon as it should show a disposition to roll away.

But the quiet peace of the room did not transmit itself to the woman. Her flying needles clicked with nervous energy and her teeth clicked together now and again as she told me the detailed story of Kees Boerma's "fall." It was appalling how much had been made out of a boy's calf-love affair. He was in the toils of a siren; he was going to the bad; he was

"upholding" unheard-of wickedness; he was, in short, "lost."

"And that's Vrouw Boerma's Kees what was always so wonderful!" Kees's mother was now reaping the harvest of envy she had been sowing through the years by holding up her boy as a model. East Nassau housewives were as eager as people are the world over to knock an idol from its pedestal.

"If it had been Teunis Spykhoven now." A hot surge of anger rushed to my face. Why must everybody but Tante Sarah and me assume that Teunis could be naturally expected to go wrong? But I controlled myself.

Later, when I was on my way back to Foppe Spykhoven's, Kees's mother hailed me from her door as I was passing the gate.

The woman was softened and tearful. Her pride had been brought low, and I saw for the first time something of Tante Sarah's kindness in her eyes. For once my heart warmed to her.

She found it pitifully hard to speak. For years she had been talking of her son in superlatives; her very attitude had always seemed to say: "Look at our Kees now!" It was this so many mothers in East Nassau had resented secretly while openly they had echoed her praise. And

now it tore her terribly to discuss Kees as she might a common mortal. Of course, he was being led astray. For a moment I suspected she was hinting at Teunis's influence on her boy being bad and I was ready to flare up in Teunis's defense, but instantly I saw my mistake. A designing woman had Kees in her toils.

Before I knew it I had promised to do my best. God knows I had no desire to interfere in a love-affair; I was even superstitious about it. But Vrouw Boerma somehow got me to promise that I would. I suppose she flattered me by taking it for granted I was the power behind the throne at Christian College, and that as its future president the work of saving the boy from a designing woman naturally fell to my duty.

But when the next day I sat facing Kees in his room in the Men's Dormitory, enough of a reaction had come to me to have put me in the curious frame of mind of wishing that I shouldn't be successful.

I shouldn't have dared to confess it at the time, but this is what I actually thought as I sat there:

"I hope he'll tell me to go to, and mind my own business!"

Explain the unprofessional attitude? I can't, but you may take my word for it that that was my thought. I almost articulated the words in my mind.

But Kees was very meek, maddeningly meek. I should have liked to shake him. Once his eyes filled with shame-faced tears and I knew that he was pretty much in love with the girl.

With almost a sardonic inward grin at myself, I told him what East Nassau was saying. He understood instantly; East Nassau's sense of outrage was not new to him. He had felt it, and he gave me the impression that he had struggled against his infatuation, but always he had made himself believe it wasn't as bad as he thought.

My bald statement of the case shocked him into an acute realization of his position. I pitied him from my soul. I fairly ached to cry out to him: "Buck up, man, and tell East Nassau and everybody else to mind their own business. Think for yourself and choose for yourself, and if it's hell you choose, stand by it like a man. Better that than crawl into heaven like a worm!"

But actually I heard myself saying: "That's how the people back home think about it. I'm telling you so that you may know what to do.

You come from a Christian home and you are attending a Christian institution. Those are things you must take into consideration. I don't know her, this young lady, and I'm casting no reflections on her, but—"

I saw Kees's head go down on his hands and I saw his breast heave. And I knew instinctively he was conjuring up before his mind's eye the thought of soft, alluring arms around his neck. My God, what a thrill shot through me as my own mind went back across the years!

He did not answer, and I hadn't the heart to press him.

A little later he looked up and was able to confess to me that he had hoped he might be able to make East Nassau see Nathalie as he saw her. True, she played the piano in the Star Theater and she was known to have attended dances at the Cretona, but—somehow Kees gave the impression that all this was not as bad as if it had been some one else doing it. He was enough in love to have the divine unreason of youth. And then he amazed me with the announcement that there was a "kind of understanding" between him and the girl. I was shocked into acute attention; I had not suspected things had gone as far as that.

But Kees straightened himself tragically. The spirit of renunciation was written on his face.

"I'll give her up, Professor Bakkerzeel; I see it's my duty. I'll give her up." His voice broke on the word and he turned away.

I rose to go. There was no more to say. Perhaps Kees, trying to imagine what I was thinking, felt he had earned my deepest esteem. But as I passed along the hall I articulated softly, "You fool! You young fool!"

And immediately after I visualized myself cutting a figure in the composite mind of East Nassau—a sort of Saint George who had fought the modern dragon and who had come forth a conqueror! It was a numberless succession of such little victories that was helping me to climb to my throne.

And late that night I suddenly astonished myself with one of those revulsions of feeling that sometimes came to me in spite of all my efforts to repress them, and I now heard myself softly articulating, after my lonely bachelor manner, "You fool! You *old* fool!"

CHAPTER XII

THAT word *schandalig*, much on the tongues of East Nassau folk, had a curious fascination for Teunis Spykhoven. It was this fatal word, I feel certain, that first attracted his attention to Nathalie Villener. If she was under the ban of East Nassau's disapproval there must be something to her! He had met the girl two or three times while Kees was as yet "in her toils," as East Nassau would have phrased it, using a Dutch idiom that meant very nearly the same thing, but he had not given her a second thought. Her appeal to him dated from the moment Kees was compelled by the public opinion of the home folks to give her up.

I did not learn about it until I happened to pay a visit to East Nassau. Vrouw Boerma, Kees's mother, was triumphant.

"Everybody can't be like our Kees, of course, Professor Bakkerzeel, but I should think Teunis might take him a little more for an example."

Evidently she was not giving me as much credit for Kees's "redemption" as I had appropriated unto myself.

"I tell you I feel for my sister Sarah; Teunis's goings-on are *schandalig*—*ja*, they're *schandalig*. But what can you really expect—him the son of such a woman!"

I swallowed hard and a curious twinge ran along my arms to my hands that closed instinctively into fists. But I controlled myself in time.

"She was not a bad woman, Vrouw Boerma—Teunis's mother wasn't," I ventured, despising myself for my mildness. "But what has Teunis been doing?"

"Doing!—Doing! *Heden*, Professor Bakkerzeel, *you* don't know about it and you there all the time with him in De Stad!" Incredulity vibrated in her voice. Then, ashamed of having cast a doubt on the word of a professor from "our school," she hastened to add, "Not that I don't believe you, Professor; it ain't that I don't believe you, but—"

She paused a moment as if to collect herself; then she broke out into a breathless deluge of words describing Teunis's "goings-on."

"And it ain't that Teunis hasn't had a good bringing-up. That I must say for Foppe, even though Sarah is a little soft about him. I should think he would know better, especially after our

Kees had shown him the girl was no good. She tried hard to lead our Kees astray, but he knew better than to be taken in by her!"

So Kees was receiving all the credit now for his renunciation! And I a modern Saint George in my own eyes so short a while ago!

"And seeing she couldn't get Kees into her clutches she goes after Teunis!" Unmistakable triumph rang in Vrouw Boerma's voice. Quickly she added, "I feel for Sarah; I can tell you I feel for her and Foppe."

Teunis Spykhoven has always been curiously reticent about his relations with Nathalie Villener. How he met her first and how they advanced to a state of intimacy in the brief space of a few weeks I have never learned. But unquestionably at the time when I first learned of the affair he had already hypnotized himself into a state of infatuation that more than matched Kees's. As for the girl, she seems to have loved facilely. I have no reason to believe that her infatuation for both Kees and Teunis was not quite genuine for the time being, as it had been quite genuine for a number of youths before them. But quite certain I am that in the case of Teunis she was not entangling him in her toils deliberately, as Vrouw Boerma as-

sumed. Quite certain I am that Teunis went after her deliberately.

But I did not venture to tell Vrouw Boerma or any one else in East Nassau that; it would have prejudiced his case all the more. Weakness was not considered as damnable as deliberate wickedness.

Curiously Teunis's fall was helping to raise Kees back on to his pedestal. I could understand Vrouw Boerma's tone of triumph. All East Nassau was veering round to her point of view that her Kees had shown commendable strength under temptation, and that the fact that this designing woman could so soon after get Teunis into her clutches somehow proved Kees a superior young man.

I slunk back to De Stad without seeing Tante Sarah. I feared she would get me to promise to do for Teunis what I had so successfully done for Kees, and somehow I couldn't face the spectacle of Teunis Spykhoven renouncing a woman, no matter how unworthy, because of the disapproval of East Nassau. As I said, I was almost superstitious about it. I felt there were worse things than falling a victim to a vampire — assuming Nathalie Villener to be such. Which she certainly was not; she didn't have the brains for it.

With all his straining after color and the spice of life and with all his passion for "going after" the things on which East Nassau frowned, Teunis was but a country boy at the time. He was a queer mixture of timidities and self-assurance. And all his innate timidity gathered in a flood of blushing embarrassment in his cheeks when Nathalie suddenly asked him in her flippant way if he danced.

"Dance?" Teunis gasped, as if she had put to him the question, "Are you a pickpocket?"—so strong in him was the East Nassau training.

Then quickly he saw that he had made a monumental blunder. The girl's question showed that she, the divinity, looked upon dancing as good and beautiful. And straightway Teunis felt that it must be good and beautiful. It simply could not be wrong. Her question had glorified it. And he bit his lip in shame. He tried to recover himself.

"I mean, I never did. I didn't learn somehow. No, I don't dance. I suppose I'm too clumsy."

"Clumsy, nothing! I just know you'd make the dearest dancer. You're built that way. I just know you would."

But Teunis held back. Dancing meant putting one's arm about one's partner's waist, he

knew. And he trembled visibly at the thought of touching Nathalie. He was but a country boy.

"That's where you make a mistake," the girl argued; "you make a mistake not trying it out. That's the only way to get acquainted. You learn to know more people in one night at a dance than you'd meet otherwise in a year. I'll tell you what you do. The Cretona is open Monday and Friday nights. What's the matter with coming up Friday night? That's the night for you. No school next day. I'd love to teach you. And you needn't be afraid, there's always plenty learning."

And before he knew it Teunis had promised. When he was alone again he was torn by an agony of trembling. Not because of the sin of dancing. That never occurred to him. Macbeth-like he would have been willing to "jump the life to come." The trouble was the dance itself. His imagination became a chaos of horrible pictures of himself in utter humiliation. He saw Nathalie laughing in derision—at him, the uncouth country boy. He would make a spectacle of himself. He saw himself a boor—an ungainly, clumsy, blundering boor. . . .

A wild night it was for Teunis. He still tin-

gled with the excitement of it as he reëntered his room after midnight. He looked at himself in the glass. His face was flushed; in his eyes there shone the wild lights of a mad ecstasy. Stretching himself to his full height he looked a young Apollo and he felt a conquering hero. He felt that he had lived for the first time that night.

He did not want to go to bed. He never wanted to sleep again. Life was too wonderful to waste in sleep. He wanted to taste every moment of it. He grudged every hour that he had not been awake during all the years of boyhood. He was a boy no longer. He felt that the mantle of manhood had been placed on his shoulders.

He took off his collar and sat down on the edge of the bed to think. . . .

He had met Nathalie at the corner drug-store, the girl having been afraid her father might raise objections if Teunis called at the house. She had been in high spirits and had soon put Teunis at ease. She had still been to him the mature woman piloting the inexperienced boy through the mazes of his first appearance in society; and yet she was only a little older than he.

Nathalie's hair had been arranged to-night—

no, last night—in still another way from the adorable fashion in which she had worn it the first time he saw her, a way still more adorable if possible. She was a beautiful woman, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. And this lovely creature had condescended to be kind to him and to introduce him to her resplendent friends. There was immense gratitude as well as trepidation in the heart of Teunis as he walked by her side to the Cretona.

True, he suffered something of a shock when he entered the hall. They were late and the dancing had been in progress for some time. His imagination had conjured up a brilliant scene of wide staircases, frescoed walls, cherub-covered ceilings. Such had been the place in which the Victorians had danced. Teunis had a clear memory of "Vanity Fair," the book he had most recently read.

Instead of being like the picture of his imagination, the room he was ushered into by Nathalie was a place that did service part of the week as a skating-rink. A long, low room, ceiling smoke-begrimed, walls papered in faded green, no staircase of any kind, the only frescoes glaring signs to the effect that the management would not be responsible for hats and cloaks!

Unconsciously also Teunis had clothed the dancers in the beautiful and picturesque court dress of the eighteenth century. His mind was steeped in the poetry of the past, and the dances of his imagination were like the airy antics of spirit beings. He had never stopped to think that a real dance was a matter of flesh and blood as well as of the poetry of motion.

It was with something of a shock, therefore, that he took in the company of dancers as soon as his eyes had become accustomed to the glare of the electric lights. Men and women, girls and boys, whirling about the room or gently swaying to the rhythm of the music or standing along the walls resting. Many of the men coatless; a few of them with sleeves rolled up! It was all horribly crude, and through Teunis passed a stab of pain.

But it was only momentary. Nathalie gave him no time to think. She took him into the whirl of things, and his senses yielded to the intoxication of the new experience.

Of all that followed Teunis had but a confused recollection as he sat on the edge of his bed reviewing the events of the evening. There had been dancing and still more dancing, and introductions to men and women — mostly

women. And he had a pleased memory of having deported himself debonairly and as a true man of the world. He had even been brilliant, this country boy. He had answered the democratically friendly sallies of the girls in kind, and they had laughed boisterously. He had been in the center of things. His handsome face had attracted the girls, and he knew it. They had begged Nathalie for introductions; and Nathalie, with a mixture in her bearing of coquetry and demureness, had carried her head high. The evening had been a triumph for her as well as for Teunis. She had been in the center of things, too. She had laughed boisterously and she had praised extravagantly his crude attempts at dancing.

And before the evening was half over, as they thought, it was after midnight. And Teunis suddenly felt that sleep were a crime.

And out of the confusion of the evening, out of the thousands of new impressions, out of the whirl of things, the new faces, the pretty girls, the swaying movement of the dancers—out of it all Nathalie stood forth. He had not known the loveliness of her until this night.

It was three o'clock when he finally turned out the light and went to bed. But in his

fevered dreams the merry lilt of the music kept sounding in his ears, and the boisterous laughter of women gradually merged into the voice of Nathalie caressingly pronouncing his name!

CHAPTER XIII

TEUNIS SPYKHOVEN traveled far in a few brief weeks. With characteristic *abandon* and careless of appearances, he plunged into the affair with Nathalie, and very naturally he became the talk of Christian College. After he had been the chief subject of discussion at two or three faculty meetings, old President Steenman took him in hand. But I gathered the next day that the veteran guardian of the morals of several college generations had not come away from that interview entirely satisfied with himself.

The whole faculty looked to me. I was understood to be the boy's unofficial guardian and mentor. But curiously I found myself glad he had jumped the traces far enough to tell Steenman to keep out of his personal affairs, as he had evidently done. How could I read him a lecture while in this frame of mind?

But the duty was inescapable. Somehow my future status in the college seemed to depend on how I should handle this affair. Steenman would retire in another year, and it was no secret that the king would name his own successor. His

recommendation to the college council would have back of it the whole weight of his thirty years of service. And my status as crown prince was at best a bit equivocal. There was Domine Elias Hilkema in the western branch of the church who was commonly understood to be my rival. I had always had the advantage of being on the ground, which enabled me to woo directly this mistress of my ambitions; but now that asset had converted itself into a liability when Teunis Spykhoven had wounded Dr. Steenman's ante-senile vanity. Saint George must do battle with the dragon or he would stand to have his lance and shield taken from him. I smiled bitterly, for I had enough of a sense of humor to see that it served me right. Somehow subconsciously I had always known that at this supreme moment in my life a woman would be my undoing, but it was a little humiliating that it must be a woman like Nathalie Villener. Comparing her with Teunis's mother, I mentally groaned.

And Saint-George-like I steeled myself to the contest. I was hotly conscious of a cloud of witnesses about me sardonically watching my slightest move. And I had no illusions about the sympathies of my colleagues on the faculty; they

were not sorry to see me in a hole. So, setting my teeth, I determined to save Teunis Spykhoven's soul the next day. That would be Saturday. I'd show Steenman and Domine Hilkema and all my fellows on the faculty!

But the dragon gobbled up Teunis's soul while the modern Saint George waited for the morrow. The "Morning Post" screamed forth the sensation. . . .

It sank into me like the sting of cold steel. I had expected something of the sort; I had been superstitious about it. And yet the blow, when it fell, was staggering. And waves of shame and self-contempt flooded over me when I found myself feeling relieved that the cup of duty had been taken away from me. For a moment I was glad that Teunis Spykhoven had fallen and saved me from the necessity of placing my career in jeopardy!

I read the headline again, then the story. Naturally the reporter had made a good deal of the fact that one of those trapped by the police in the raid on the Cretona was a student at the ultra-puritanic college. By reason of this unfortunate fact Teunis Spykhoven stood forth in the story. Though there were a dozen other men and nearly that many girls involved in the

raid, the affair somehow became identified with his personality.

I sat with the "Post" spread out before me, my bachelor's breakfast untasted.

"Of course that drags the college in—it'll go all the harder with him for that." I mumbled the words to myself, forgetful of my surroundings.

"Beg pardon." The voice came from across the little restaurant table. I started, embarrassed.—"Thought you said something," the man continued.

He was a stranger to me. I explained my unfortunate habit of thinking aloud. He smiled and I could see him putting me down for a queer fish. Which I suppose I was.

His eye caught the headlines in my paper as I laid it aside.

"Hello! Raided the Cretona, did they? So the police have finally woke up. And it was about time, believe me. It beats the dickens how they'll let a low-down booze-joint like that keep going. Pull, I tell you, pull! They get a hand-out out of it till it gets so rotten it smells."

Assuming my permission he took possession of the paper. Reading he chuckled.

"All gloriously pickled; girls trying to do

their fancy steps on the card tables instead of on the floor. Woouw! I'll bet the officers' eyes hurt!"

He devoured the details.

"Pretty rough on this here college chap with the queer name." Then as an afterthought, "That'll give the college a black eye."

"Undoubtedly." I had to say something.

"How do you suppose *he* got mixed up with a bunch like that?" Evidently my talkative table companion had made no guess as to my identity. It would serve no object to enlighten him.

"In search of color, I suppose." I didn't realize how idiotic it sounded.

My companion regarded me with a queer expression. Then he broke into a roar.

"Oh, I getcha!" he bawled, attracting the attention of the others in the place to us—"Color! that's good! Well, I kin promise ya he found it—at least, if it hadn't all been sweated away from the women's faces!" He roared hilariously again.

It would have been useless to explain to him. I smiled wanly. He wiped his lips with his napkin and left me to my misery. . . .

I found it equally useless to attempt to ex-

plain to Dr. Steenman and my fellows on the faculty. They looked bewildered at first, not quite certain of my meaning. It was that same afternoon and we had come together in hurried consultation.

"Do I understand Mr. Bakkerzeel to affirm that hereditary tendencies toward frivolity should serve to explain—and to excuse—young Spykhoven's—er—lapse?" asked Vanden Heuvel, the vice-president, who, I knew, secretly hated me for my designs on the presidency. His smile was almost a sneer.

Dr. Steenman looked at me, and I hated myself because my eyes fell before his level gaze.

"To explain, not excuse; that is, not altogether." It was a futile thing to say. But all my life I had been a coward.

"Sin is sin," Dr. Steenman interpolated dogmatically.

For a moment I was strongly tempted to give it up. What was the use? What purpose could be served by continuing to defend Teunis? His fate was decided anyway. By antagonizing Steenman I should be merely jeopardizing my position in the college.

I shudder now as I think of what the result would have been if I had yielded to that im-

pulse. Somehow I found courage to meet my superior's succinct pronouncement.

"I cannot agree with Dr. Steenman that sin is sin. Murder isn't always murder. We recognize all sorts of mitigating circumstances, and the act of taking a life may only approximate murder in varying degrees."

Had I prepared this statement beforehand I should have said it more diplomatically. But it was out and I rushed on, although Dr. Steenman was about to defend his point.

"I repeat that young Spykhoven's—er—lapse, adopting Mr. Vanden Heuvel's word, must be looked upon in the light of his past—of how he has been brought up, of his heredity, if you like."

I saw several thinly veiled smiles from my colleagues.

"The boy's mother was an artist—would have been a great artist had she lived."

My voice trembled. I was skating on extremely thin ice.

"She would have been a great actress." I hesitated for the fraction of a second—"I knew her well, and it is my conviction that she would have been a great artist in her profession if she had lived."

I looked about for some sign of sympathetic response on some face. What I was saying seemed so supremely important to me, and my fellows on the faculty astounded me by sitting there cold and expressionless. I might have been speaking of the irregularities of the Latin verb for all the interest they showed. But I plunged on.

"And her genius has descended on her boy."

I don't know what made me say that. I had not meant to say anything of the kind. But it was out and Dr. Steenman caught me up sternly; it was his opportunity.

"And so you mean to argue, Mr. Bakkerzeel, that a young man who is to be a genius" (I could not help but catch the sneer of skepticism) — "that we are to wink at the sins of such for the sake of the genius? Do I understand that that's your doctrine?"

"Not at all, not at all. But try to put yourself in his place. All his life his normal desires have been repressed—he wasn't allowed to read Shakespeare, he wasn't allowed to see a circus or go to a fair or see a play."

"Well!" snapped Steenman. For the moment I had forgotten how Steenman himself regarded such things, especially the theater. I myself had

always refrained from going to a play for the sake of appearances—and later I always hated myself for it.

I paid no attention to the exclamation.

“Repressed, repressed, all his life! And all the time the genius of his mother, which was his by inheritance, clamoring for color.”

Again there were smiles of amusement. I knew I was talking to a stone wall, but I had to go on now.

“It’s easy for us to laugh it all down as notions—for us who have been born mere plod-horses. And just because the vast majority of people are just such dull plodders, without a single spark of the divine fire in them, they have made a lot of rules and restrictions by which they expect the live ones to live; and when they rebel, they *sin*.”

I caught myself there. Again I knew that if I had been writing the words I should have marked out most of them. For years I had been doing that kind of thing, expressing my real thoughts and then suppressing them, and now that habit of saying what I felt betrayed me—and there was no chance for self-censorship.

I knew that I was not being interrupted because several were glad to give me enough

rope to hang myself. It maddened me, but it did not cause a return of prudence.

"What else could you expect than that the boy should go to the opposite extreme?" I shouted. "All legitimate pleasure taken from him, he falls the victim of a cheap young woman."

"And ends up in a place that is next door to a brothel," Steenman finished with the air of closing a futile discussion.—"And not content with that, he drags the fair name of Christian College through the mire. He caps my thirty years of service with a bit of ghastly anticlimax and nullifies by his rash weakness and his so-called desire for color the influence that a score of devoted men have built up laboriously through many years. But the chief horror of the whole miserable business is that one of my own faculty members and one who himself is understood to be aspiring to a position of leadership in this Christian institution should defend such shameful wickedness and weakness on the plea that he sees sparks of genius in the weakling. Genius!" The word was packed with withering contempt.

I didn't have a leg to stand on. After all, it was preposterous to speak of a nineteen-year-

old school-boy as a coming genius. What did I know about it? He had never shown me any of his work because he didn't like me. And even if he had, there wouldn't have been much to go by. There was the tragedy after the manner of the "Ædipus Tyrannus," his most mature work so far, but hopelessly artificial. Then there was the little one-act piece, "The Cup of Virtue," which the "Quarterly Review" has recently dug up as an example of his early manner; its stiffness and banality are painful. He had had brief enthusiasms for nature poetry, for drama, for the historical romance, for the epic. The reading of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had resulted in a slave story, and the study of Tennyson's "Idylls" had brought forth an epic on Arthur in blank verse—or rather the beginnings of an epic. He seldom finished anything.

But all in all perhaps he hadn't written a dozen lines so far that were worth a second thought, and even those I did not know about. And here I was confidently proclaiming him a genius! If it had not been all so sharply tragic to me I should have laughed at my own expense.

In brief, I had wasted the time of my colleagues and myself. Teunis was summarily ex-

pelled from Christian College, and Dr. Steenman saw to it that the "Evening News" carried the story of the faculty's action, in an attempt to remove the blot on the fair name of the institution.

But a committee of the faculty was sent to Teunis to acquaint him with the verdict and to give him a chance to become reinstated. All he needed to do was to appear before the student body, confess his sin openly, and promise in future to lead such a life as would not bring shame and disgrace on them all.

The story of the committee's visit to Teunis's room has become historic at Christian College. Vanden Heuvel, the vice-president, was the spokesman.

"It is a very small thing to ask of you, Mr. Spykhoven," he concluded paternally, the other two members of the committee nodding their entire assent—"a very small thing to ask in view of the great sin you've fallen into. We are all disposed to act in accordance with the principles of Christian charity toward you—for your own sake and for the sake of those who are dear to you."

Teunis was unstrung. The night before he had been intoxicated for the first time in his

life, and he was miserably conscious of having made a beast of himself generally. He was sick of everything—of the dead monotony of Christian College, of his life of subterfuge, of the faculty members with their stilted phrases that always somehow smelled of Scripture, of his own worthlessness—sick of life and thought. His head ached and every precise word from Vanden Heuvel started a thousand little devils of pain hammering in his brain.

Vanden Heuvel and his fellow committee members sat waiting.

"Dr. Steenman is waiting for your answer, Mr. Spykhoven," the vice-president persisted; "what shall I tell him?"

Teunis was desperate. Would they never go away and leave him to his misery? He hardly heard the words.

"What shall I tell him?" Vanden Heuvel repeated, a suggestion of impatience creeping into his voice.

Teunis could stand no more. "Oh, tell him to go to hell!" he shouted, and dropping on his bed he clutched his head with his hands.

CHAPTER XIV

It was a complete break with his past. Foppe Spykhoven quite naturally cast him off. Tante Sarah wept her eyes out for her boy, but she could not go to him in the face of her husband's interdict. I went to see him several times, but my very genuine pity for him did not find any response in his own heart toward me; he didn't trust me.

Even Nathalie Villener was taken from him. The girl was packed off by her father to an aunt in Chicago until the storm that the raid on the Cretona had aroused in De Stad should have passed. He couldn't go to East Nassau. In De Stad he was in disgrace among all who knew him. His cousin Kees avoided him as he would a plague. He had no money and didn't know how to earn any. He was an outcast and he felt himself polluted and disgraced. I was powerless to help him; in his mind I was representative of the life he loathed, and he wouldn't have anything to do with me.

Going over the whole situation in my mind, I came to the conclusion that Teunis Spykhoven was about as completely deserted and cut

off from the life he had known as mortal man could be.

I had not reckoned with Esther Irving—"hard little Esther," as I always classified her in my mind. I had met her several times. She was something or other in the Associated Charities. There was always that undefined air of efficiency about her. She would never lose her confident little head about any nonsense like other girls. There was no nonsense about her and no feminine weakness. She was master of her own destiny and she would let nothing stand in her way. In short, she was "hard"—hatefully hard.

She came upon him in his room where he sat brooding. It was but the day before that his answer to Vanden Heuvel had catapulted the faculty committee out of his room. Esther had guessed that he would be without money, and on the way she had stopped at the bank to draw out fifty dollars from her already respectable hoard. But when she stood confronting him she did not dare offer it. Something told her that it would be the wrong thing to do to offer him money. He needed other help.

How can I know how she gave it? All I have to go by is results. All I know is that the next

day he wrote "Into the Shadows," that strangely haunting prayer of repentance so unlike anything else in American literature—a sort of secular Fifty-first Psalm. He could not have written it until he had been raised from the dust.

And Esther somehow helped to raise Teunis Spykhoven from the dust—hard little Esther! Perhaps she did not know what she was doing and he did not know it. But I have always felt that the world owes much of the haunting beauty of "Into the Shadows" to Esther.

For me the big thing is that she went to him at all. It makes me exult even now, years afterwards. She went to him, God bless her!

Part II

Part II

CHAPTER I

IN my own mind I always thought of it as "The Rise of Little Esther," as though it was the heading of a chapter. Little she would always remain to me; I could never get the picture out of my mind of how she looked that day back there in East Nassau when she as much as sent me about my business. And little she was in reality, but with an exquisiteness about the curves of her body that at first glance gave no hint of the hard efficiency by which she was rapidly winning her way to the top. She was as unlike my somewhat old-fogy idea of the "business woman" as any girl could very well have been. Even her eyes did not play up to the rôle of a "business success." There was a liquid softness about them that constantly deceived people into assuming feminine weakness; but once or twice I saw those eyes flash a fire that made me quake and that never afterwards allowed me to forget that "little Esther" could adequately take care of herself. As a child she had quickly seen through the insincerity of my

Scriptural phraseology, and I never dared strike a pose before her now. I had an uncomfortable feeling that those softly liquid eyes saw a great many things.

Her rise had been rapid and few of us knew how desperately hard she worked. We talked of her having a "genius for organization," as though that meant anything. And I'm the last man to deny her a claim to the possession of genius. But something more than that was needed to explain her. It was as if her will had set its teeth and kept them set. She *would* "get there," and I could imagine her, alone in her office, clenching her capable hands. Whatever of the divine fire was in her was not allowed to burn low; she kept it fanned into flame. I admired her tremendously while at the same time I was a little afraid of her.

Teunis Spykhoven was the single bond between us. When he went away Esther and I learned to know and to respect each other. She saw quickly what had always escaped Teunis, that my interest in him was not the perfunctory one of teacher in pupil, and I knew her well enough to understand that if she had not felt a genuine liking for Teunis, not all the childhood friendship on earth would have been able to

cause her to waste a thought on him. She was too busy for sentimentality, and I could imagine her disposing of the claims of an ancient friendship with a contemptuous little toss of the head.

She was not in love with him. That was very plain. Also somehow I couldn't imagine a girl in the early twenties, whose salary already was eighteen hundred dollars, as the "Eagle" had more than once informed me (my own salary was only fourteen hundred dollars)—I couldn't imagine her in love. But she wrote Teunis a long letter each week and this letter she did not dictate to her stenographer. But how little sentiment there was in them I learned from Teunis's answers. For two years I called at Esther's office once a week for the sole purpose of reading those answers, and never was there a word, from the opening "Dear Esther" to the final "Yours, T. S.," that betrayed more than the comradely friendship of their boy-and-girl days.

It was Esther's suggestion, of course. I called at her office to learn what I could about Teunis. It was three or four months after he slipped away. When I entered she was sitting ensconced behind a flat-topped desk, one hand standing a paper-weight on edge. With the other she gestured now and then unconsciously

as she talked with incisive emphasis into a dictaphone.

I was about to withdraw, seeing her engaged, but she held up her hand to stay me while bringing the sentence to an end. Throwing off the switch she greeted me, her voice rising above the dying whirl of the instrument.

I stumbled into some banal remarks about what a wonderful machine a dictaphone is.

"It saves time," said Esther. I felt the blood rising to my face. Was she telling me to state my business and get out? She read my thought.

"That's why I always have plenty of time to waste." She smiled pleasantly.

I took courage.

"I come from Tante Sarah." Instantly I saw her eyes soften. "Oh!" was all she said, but it was enough to make me feel thrice welcome.

"She's anxious about Teunis; for some reason he failed to write this week."

Verbally the truth, but I was more anxious than Teunis's mother. Tante Sarah's faith in her boy was almost absurd in its extravagance. If he failed to write, he must have a good reason.

"And he didn't write to you either?"

"He never does." Even Esther could only guess at the pain it gave me to say this.

Her eyes seemed to bore through me for a moment. And I knew that my talk of Tante Sarah's anxiety didn't deceive her.

"Teunis doesn't understand you; he's prejudiced." It was said with a businesslike impartiality, but I quivered with something like an ecstasy of pleasure. Deprecatingly I protested that he understood me too well, but Esther passed it over as unimportant. She was unlocking a drawer in her desk and taking out a letter. She held it out to me.

"Came yesterday."

I protested: "But, Miss Esther, I couldn't—I didn't mean—"

"Nonsense; why shouldn't you?" And my hand was already eagerly reaching out for it. "Take your time to read it; I'll just finish this letter meanwhile," and she turned on the switch of the dictaphone.

The telephone bell rang. Answering, her voice crackled. It seemed to cut like a knife. I shivered. Suppose I had been at the other end of that wire! She insisted that something or other had to be done. I tried not to listen, but what she said penetrated to my inmost consciousness. I knew that what she said must be done would be done. . . .

Before she could turn to her dictaphone again a reporter entered. Esther was instantly the embodiment of gracious ease.

"I wrote out my statement, Mr. Strong—saves bother"—and she handed him a type-written sheet.

There was an immense respect written on the young man's face. There was nothing of the supercilious air of world-weariness that the very young newspaper man frequently affects.

"Thanks awfully, Miss Irving," he said with a hint of bashfulness in his voice. "Stark will eat it up, every word of it—always does with your stuff."

Esther smiled. "Very kind of him—and of you. I appreciate it.—Have a cigar!" And taking a box of them from a drawer she held it out to him.

Strong stammered his thanks, standing there with Esther's copy in one hand and the cigar in the other. He was obviously nervous, as if he were in the presence of a very important personage, and he talked rapidly about something that I connected with the telephone conversation. Esther's tone unconsciously took on an incisive quality again and Strong was boyishly eager to agree with her as to the absolute necessity of

having something or other done immediately; I didn't catch what it was. Stark would feature it, he said warmly; the "Eagle" would force action. . . .

Esther's eyes danced when the door had closed on him.

"A plain bribe, you're thinking, Mr. Bakkerzeel, that cigar. No, don't deny it; I *know*.— (By the way, have one yourself!)"

I expressed my thanks about as sheepishly as Strong had done.

"Well, in a way it is bribery. What's the use trying to gloss it over? But suppose a man were holding down my job. He wouldn't think anything of offering a reporter a cigar, even if he himself didn't smoke. He would need the 'Eagle's' support, just as I need it. There are plenty of men ready to snap up my job as soon as I lose my grip. But I'm not intending to lose my grip!" Unconsciously her teeth snapped together.

"It's for a good cause," I said lamely.

"Yes," she answered, so dryly that I felt uncomfortable. And she did not take advantage of the opportunity to gush about the noble service the Associated Charities was rendering. Her forbearance unaccountably made me feel

ashamed; in her place I shouldn't have been able to resist.

"Of course," she continued after an eloquent pause, "I have an advantage over a man. They expect it from a man—are calloused to it—it's a matter of course. From a woman it sticks in the memory because of the surprise. It helps get what I need—helps more than you think. I'm doing a man's work and I'm using a man's methods—plus a woman's!"

She smiled. "I suppose you think it's dreadful?"

I disclaimed any such thought and quite truthfully. Her utter frankness made the little episode seem somehow almost beautiful.

I finished reading Teunis's letter and tip-toed to her desk: Esther was talking into the dictaphone again. And it was then, after she had shut off the instrument, that she made the proposal that I come every Thursday to read the weekly letter.

Staggered by the unexpectedness of it I stammered:

"But, Miss Esther—"

"Nonsense, you're fond of him, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, yes, but—"

"Then there's no reason why you shouldn't if

you'd like to. No, it won't inconvenience me. I shall expect you."

And again there was that curious suggestion of dismissal indefinably in the very air enveloping her that had sent me packing several years ago in East Nassau. But I went exulting now, not crestfallen as then. My dried-up bachelor soul seemed aglow with a warmth that was like a renaissance of youth.

CHAPTER II

IT was borne in upon me after a time that Teunis's letters were of value to Esther chiefly for the pleasure they gave me. Except for that, she might have left off writing to him, I came to feel, though she was careful never to give this impression. Teunis in New York little knew that he owed the weekly letter from Esther to the lonely college professor whose very existence he had forgotten. Esther was so intensely absorbed in her struggle to "get there" that it must have taken will power of a high order to sit down each week, detach her mind from business, and write to one who evidently was doing his best to send himself to the devil in several of a number of ways open to young men.

"You were in love with his mother?" she asked me once quite abruptly.

We had become great friends and my weekly visit to her office was already as much to see Esther as to read Teunis's letter.

I nodded, curiously inarticulate.

"I guessed that long ago—your interest in him and all that."

I shivered inwardly. What else did this amaz-

ing young woman guess? But I didn't care. After all, I was no longer aiming for the presidency of Christian College. That plum had fallen into my rival's lap and I had long since become reconciled to it.

But Esther was quite innocent of intention to disinter family skeletons. She had no curiosity beyond establishing an adequate motive for my interest in Teunis.

"Very beautiful—a lifelong devotion to a memory. But I, in your place, if a woman had thrown me over for another, would have made up my mind *deliberately* to forget her—I'd have *willed* it."

"But she was not to blame, Esther."

She smiled skeptically. "I knew you'd say that. . . . But we won't talk about it any more."

And I was only too glad to drop the subject. But in my turn I felt a right to skepticism as to what she would have *willed* to do in my place. Was she not going to much trouble each week for a sentimental old professor who never had been and never could be anything to her?

The gradual dying-out of the correspondence between Esther and Teunis on such terms was inevitable. If I hadn't been a fool I should not

have been shocked when the first signs of the end began to appear. Esther, with me at her mental elbow as it were to spur her on, doggedly did her part, but Teunis's letters began to be more infrequent.

"He's too busy, I suppose," she comforted me. There was no longer even a pretense between us that *she* needed any comforting.

"I suppose he is." I said it bitterly, I'm afraid.

"But put yourself in his place, Mr. Bakkerzeel. It's two years ago since he saw any one of us—people he didn't care any too much for to begin with. And now work that absorbs him and new friends and—"

"Work that absorbs him—doing an act in fifth-rate vaudeville!" I exploded, unable to control myself. It had long been a sore subject with me, but of course there was nothing I could do.

Esther was silent, but her silence was more eloquent than words that what Teunis Spykhoven did or did not do meant nothing to her—it distressed her only because it distressed me.

She must have protested to Teunis. For a few weeks his letters came regularly again. Then they began to be displaced by picture postcards, and at last there was silence again.

But every Thursday afternoon I called at Esther's office, the original excuse for the call almost forgotten in time. And she was never too busy to talk.

Her name and cut were often in one or another of the three newspapers of De Stad. She was an effective public speaker, and the Associated Charities was "in politics," a fact that all three newspapers were constantly bewailing. But not Esther. She was entirely frank about it to me.

"It's good for the A. C. to be in politics—keeps it up to the scratch. Would be good for your college to get a dose of something like that to contend with. You have nothing to compete against."

I smiled ironically in my classroom manner.

"You forget, Esther, the innate stupidity of the college student. What more do you want to develop backbone on?"

Esther laughed. "You're lucky that I turned you down when you wanted me as a student."

"You were too bright for us." I said it in perfect sincerity. . . .

"Of course,"—she reverted to the original subject,—“the ‘gang,’ as the newspapers always refer to the politicians, are mixing in the A. C. for what they can get out of it for them-

selves. That's perfectly plain. But what about the rest of us—about me?"

"About you?—you!"

"Yes, me. Oh, I know, the good I'm doing and all that kind of thing, but I'm not pluming myself on that too much. First there's a good salary—that's as it should be: I'm earning every cent of it and more. But that's the least of it. I'm getting a name out of it." She showed me a filing-case bursting with newspaper cuttings that a clipping bureau was supplying to the office.

"We're all working for something like that along with the so-called disinterested motives—same as the 'gang' that the papers are always abusing. And listen to this, Mr. Bakkerzeel: it's good for the A. C. The organization would still be a little, futile, one-horse concern if I and the others like me hadn't hitched our personal ambitions to it and made those ambitions drag it out of the mud."

Again as always her frankness shocked me a little. It ran counter to the ingrained habits and traditions of my whole life. I had so often told others that I was at Christian College for the good of Christian education that I had come to believe it myself, and I was always hearing ministers and school-teachers comforting them—

selves for their low salaries with the thought that they were in the work because they could "do so much good."

Esther sorted out a number of clippings that carried her cut.

"I'm working that hard just now," she said, half to herself. "Vanity?—Well—a little, perhaps. I'll confess it always gives me a little thrill of pleasure to see myself in the paper—that's the woman of it; though I suppose it's about the same with men. But that isn't all. I'm after the secretaryship of the State Federation; it would double my salary. This kind of thing"—pointing to the clippings—"gives me standing!"

For several months there was no letter from Teunis, and even his letters to Tante Sarah were haphazard. They, too, would stop presently, I told Esther bitterly. Then one day a long letter came. It was as if Teunis had become conscience-stricken by his long neglect of her. Esther smiled; she understood. Presently he would forget again.

But *she* did not forget Tante Sarah. A week or two later when I called at the farm Tante Sarah was full of the subject. Esther had taken the trouble, breaking away from her work, to call on Tante Sarah and show her the letter.

Ostensibly she had come to East Nassau to pay her father a visit. He was living alone now, mildly insane, but harmless. But Tante Sarah was not deceived.

"She's got a good heart, Kommer—Professor, I should say. She was afraid Teunis hadn't written to me. I always did like little Esther. Do you think, Kommer, that—"

She hesitated. I shook my head, catching her meaning.

Tante Sarah sighed.

"It would have been so nice," she said; "she's so good-hearted — just like Teunis!"

"More likely he'll marry some worthless flapper who has 'temperament' and all that kind of rot," I thought bitterly, but I did not venture to say it to Tante Sarah.

For she would listen to nothing against Teunis. All East Nassau was convinced that he had gone to the devil completely, but she held to her stubborn conviction that he was as good as anybody—as good as Kees!—as good as Kees, who had been solemnly inducted into the glories of the professorship of ethics at Christian College!

"I'm knitting him a pair of socks," she said, a love-note in her voice; and she got out for

my inspection the knitting she always kept hidden from her husband, who never asked after Teunis and never referred to him, but whose hair was always a little grayer and whose face was always a little more drawn each time I saw him.

I smiled. I could not imagine Teunis wearing the heavy woolen socks in the New York theater where he did his mimicry act. But I did not mention my misgivings to Tante Sarah. Also, in moments when I forgot my bitterness and brought back before my mind's eye the real Teunis I had known, I could see him keeping his mother's gift in the top of his trunk and taking the socks out late at night to fondle them.

They would serve to keep his heart warm if not his feet.

CHAPTER III

NEITHER in the letters to Esther nor in those to Tante Sarah was there ever a word of complaint. For all the information they gave about his finances he might have been living on the fat of the land.

"At least he doesn't whine," I often told myself with something like a thrill of pride, and my mind would leap back a score of years. *She*, too, had always been too proud to whine.

But as time went on I became increasingly conscious that there had been a great disillusionment. I don't know how I understood this, but it was a very definite impression. And Esther shared it with me.

"He's beginning to see that life isn't all beer and skittles," she remarked, smiling. Her penetration startled me; I had plumed myself on being the only one who had noticed it. Certainly Tante Sarah had no suspicion of it.

"How—what makes you think that?"

But put to it, Esther couldn't explain any more than I could have explained.

"I suppose he dreamed of taking the world by storm and the world refuses to be taken."

He began to jump about. From New York to Toronto, from Toronto to Philadelphia. Later still, Tante Sarah received a letter from New Orleans. I got the impression that he was chasing the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow.

And then one day in Esther's office I was startled by a picture post-card from London. I wondered from where the fare to cross the Atlantic had come, but as usual there was not a word about ways and means. The message on the post-card was almost laconic in its brevity. Years later I learned that he crossed in a cattle boat. It appealed to him as a lark before he embarked, but disillusionment came almost before the vessel had left the wharf. The loathing he felt for the brutal beast in charge of the cattle and the crew who tended them never left him.

He managed to see a good deal of London and Paris and wandered over most of England and France, dipping even into Germany and Belgium. He refused to cross the border into Holland; the country reminded him too forcibly of East Nassau, and he was still trying desperately to get East Nassau out of his blood. I'm not sure that I understood that at the time, but I do now. He had wanted to get away from it.

Not physically only. He had thought of East Nassau as a taint in his system. All through the years the East Nassau spirit had tried to force him, for the good of his soul, into the accepted moulds. It had tried to subdue the wildness in him, not understanding that the wildness in him—wildness only from East Nassau's point of view—*was* the essential quality in him, and that by taming it it was killing him. He had wanted *freedom*—spiritual freedom he called it in his more grandiose moments.

But had he found it? Was he beginning to suspect that East Nassau was the world in miniature—its peculiar local and racial prejudices typical of prejudices fundamentally the same the world over? Was that why he jumped from city to city, from America to Europe?

Anyway, he did not find what he went out to seek. He didn't say it in so many words—probably didn't know it himself clearly. I got the impression that he was merely groping. Oh, I know, he cuts a poor figure beside the hero of modern fiction, but I can't help that. Said hero always knows exactly to a T what he wants and he goes after it with the regulation decision that corresponds exactly to his regulation square jaw. Teunis Spykhoven didn't know clearly

what he wanted. The only thing he knew clearly was that he didn't want what East Nassau and the rest of the world wanted him to want. Even from his letters I understood that he had not succeeded in getting "East Nassau out of his blood."

He spent a great deal of his time devouring books—the great books. He chose well instinctively. There were times when he was out of a job and when he was compelled to subsist on free lunches that went with a glass of beer; and he would rise from such a meal to spend his afternoon in the library. Had he been a hero of modern fiction he would not have mooned away his time like that. He would have worked himself up in a bank and later flashed his fortune on an admiring East Nassau. But unfortunately he didn't see any sense in that, so he fed on free lunches unashamedly and wasted his time reading instead of hustling for a job, as any "bright young man with a future" would surely have done.

In the early twenties Teunis Spykhoven had a more intimate acquaintance with what is worth while in ancient and modern literature than I myself had at forty, and I've always been in the habit of considering myself a well-read man.

He amazed me one day years later with his intimate knowledge of pre-Shakespearean drama.

"How'd I get time for all that? Oh, I just swam in it during my life in New York. Had a great deal more time than money in those days."

And when critics profess to find traces of the pessimism of Turgenev and Dostoevsky in his work, I always wonder if he "swam in" the great Russians as well during his New York days. It was the first time in his life that he had had access to unlimited books, and he may be said to have got drunk on them. A queer picture he makes in my mind—lunching at the free counter in a noisy saloon, forgetting himself and his hunger during the blissful afternoon hours in the dreams of the great Russian pessimists or of the writers of the rollicking folk-plays that antedate the work of the greatest play-builder of them all, and then at night doing a trivial mimicry stunt in a cheap theater and getting kissed by amorous little Janice before the scandalized eyes of the other players!

About her, too, he told me years later—about little Janice. One of several she was, but the names of most of the others he had forgotten,

and she somehow in his mind typified that side of his life.

"I suppose, Mr. Bakkerzeel, I was a little out of my head on this subject of doing as I pleased—going to hell, if I liked, in my own way. That's why little Janice and the rest of them like her appealed to me."

And urged by me, he told me about her with a kind of shame-faced frankness:

"She wasn't a bad little girl. She had a way of taking my face between her hands in the dressing-room and kissing me right before whoever happened to be in the room."

He smiled reminiscently.

"I was embarrassed, of course, but I liked it, nevertheless. And I liked her. I had had two or three brief love-affairs before, but this one somehow was different. For a short time I thought I was in love with her really. Of course she was married, but I had the freedom craze then, as I said, and I told myself I'd be damned if I'd let conventions interfere with me."

He laughed now at the Teunis Spykhoven of those days.

"That recommended her to me, in fact, that she was married. It would be so—so—un-East-Nassau-like! I wanted to get East Nassau out of

my system. I was fed up on it, as the English say. And I even planned to appear on the scene here with Janice!"

"But you didn't."

"No, I didn't . . ." reflectively. "I don't know why. It wasn't Janice who saved me from making that kind of a fool of myself. She wasn't a deliberately bad girl. Just wanted to be loved and kissed a lot and treated to candy and ice-cream sodas. Nothing of the vampire about her, though—nothing schemy—she just lived for the moment. . . . And I did much the same. I liked to hold her in my arms, though her kisses in public irritated me. She did a dancing stunt in the same act in which I did my mimicry stuff, and she loved to twirl her bobbing skirts at me behind the scenes, making them look like a multi-colored disc, and then fall into my arms pretending dizziness."

"And she was in love with you?" I'm afraid I gave a suggestion of scandalized priggishness, for Teunis laughed.

"Lord, how do I know? Of course, she didn't do that to any one else, but that may be because nobody else would stand for it. They were amazingly respectable, the company, so much so that in my orgy of freedom I despised them a

little for their narrowness! Maybe Janice made love to me simply because I was green!"

He was passing on to something else, but I brought him back to the subject. It had a curious fascination for me.

"Why didn't I?" he answered. "Honestly, I don't know. On the way over to New York I told myself that at last I was free—could do as I pleased. I remember talking to myself. 'I can do as I damn please,' I said, taking something like a shuddering delight in the mild profanity. I used the cuss-word to prove to myself my freedom. And during the months in the same act with Janice I used to insist on it that I was free."

"But you found you weren't?"

"I suppose I did in a way, though I never argued it out definitely. I just simply didn't do—well—what I might have done—didn't make myself as ridiculous as you might have expected."

"Did I have anything to do with it, Teunis?" I trembled a little as I asked it.

He looked at me, puzzled. "You!—I hadn't thought of that; perhaps you did. I know you would to-day."

I had to be satisfied with that.

"No, I think if it was anybody, it was father."

"Your father!—Foppe Spykhoven!"

"Funny, isn't it? He fed me up on East Nassau as much as anybody, but I think I felt instinctively that, within his limits, he was true gold. And that was sort of a—a—challenge to me. I'm not putting it very well, Mr. Bakker-zeel, but that's how it must have been. Oh, yes, there was mother—and—and Esther, but I honestly think they didn't have as much to do with it as father. He sort of stood for everything I detested. But he was genuine in standing for all that; there were no rotten spots. And if I was ever to justify my revolt from all he believed in, I would have to be genuine."

Teunis did not understand how he was shamming me and tearing open wounds.

"Don't think for a minute I was arguing all this out. I was only a kid, half drunk with freedom—and completely drunk with cheap beer a few times—had a lot of half-baked notions, moreover, that a writer had to 'taste life' and all that kind of thing. But somehow I couldn't become that particular brand of fool that a run-away match with a married woman would have involved."

"You weren't free."

"That's it, I guess, though I didn't see through that then. It made me angry sometimes

before I understood. Always I felt that I should be happy as soon as I could break loose entirely from everything. I said it was East Nassau that was still in my blood and that by going off with Janice I'd be rid of it forever. But I didn't go with her. It never went any further than sloppy kissing in the dressing-room."

But I'm jumping ahead. It was many years later when he told me that—after he and I had become close friends. Just now all I knew about his life was what was contained in laconic messages to Esther on picture post-cards or in letters to Tante Sarah that were getting briefer as the years passed. I was expecting all the time to find a card from Australia or India or Japan.

And then one afternoon, as suddenly as he had left, he walked in on me. I gripped his hand fiercely, too astonished to say a word. His face was thinner than I remembered it; he did not exude the robust health that I had been accustomed to in him when I last saw him nearly five years before. But in his eyes shone the same flame that had always burned there—the flash that never failed to carry me back some twenty-five years to a woman in whose eyes I had seen that same fire.

CHAPTER IV

It was in my bachelor rooms that he met Tante Sarah. That's why he had looked me up immediately on his return. For a moment I had exulted in the insane notion that he had come to me for my own sake, but he undeceived me very soon.

"I thought perhaps you might be willing to let me see mother here, as you and she have always been such great friends." It was after he had given me a rapid sketch of his wanderings. I had by no means heard all I wanted to hear and I was not to hear all then. The full story of it took him years to convey to me; in strict fact, bits of it are still to be told.

"Will I, *perhaps*! Good Heavens, Teunis, you didn't think for a moment I wouldn't?"

He was plainly surprised at my vehemence. During all those five years of his absence he had probably never given me a thought. I was nobody; one of those he wanted to forget; dry, with no juice in me; there was no drama to me, no color. A few years more and he might have lost my very name; he might have woke up in the middle of the night some time vaguely

troubled by some unaccountable stirring in the hinterland of his memories, as all of us sometimes are in the small hours, for no reason at all that any one can discover—he might have woke up out of the curious necessity to remember a name that had slipped almost out of his grasp. “What *was* the old fellow’s name?” he might have whispered into the darkness—“dry old stick, but great friend of mother’s—some B about it: Batterveld—no, that wasn’t it; Bak-kerveld, no . . . I’ve got it, Bakkerzeel!”—triumphantly, and contentedly going to sleep again. Oh, there’s no denying it, we all chase just such useless and wholly irrelevant memories now and again, and we feel triumphant on recovering a name or a date that can never be any conceivable use to us. What of it whether it was ’78 or ’76 when we broke our arm? Out here in the twentieth century it can’t make any possible difference. But we become certain that it was in ’78—not ’76. “It was in ’78, by George!”—and we laugh with a sense of victory.

And here was I going into heroics about a simple question from him. I could see that he was puzzled. Emotion from dry old Bakkerzeel, and with regard to him, Teunis! So Balaam

must have felt when the ass turned to him and spake. . . .

I was not present at the first meeting with Tante Sarah the next day, nor at the meetings that followed. I left them alone, pretending work at the college. I mention the meetings in my rooms during the months when Teunis had only his too public boarding-room parlor as alternative trysting-place only because they served as a beginning of our friendship. He learned to come to my apartment for my own sake after a while. For my own sake! He didn't suspect in the least how my pulses raced the first time he did that; he didn't suspect that I stopped to blow my nose for any reason except the vulgar one that the nose insisted on being blown!

When he came back to De Stad, Teunis Spyk-hoven was halfway through with "Everglades"—unnamed as yet at the time. Heaven only knows in what likely and unlikely places he wrote the first two acts. His wandering life was not favorable to sustained composition. He found this out after a time. That's why he came home.

How he lived I didn't quite understand. I didn't dare offer him money; our friendship was

as yet a plant of too tender growth to take any chances of subjecting it to frostbite. But he lived somehow, although he seldom left his little bedroom, working there furiously on his comedy.

(Or is "Everglades" a tragedy? Critics don't seem to agree. Personally I always feel a tragic note in the very flavor of its exquisite fun, but then I . . .)

Professor Vanden Heuvel, still vice-president of Christian College—"second fiddle to Domine Hilkema," is the way I always referred to him in my own mind a bit contemptuously—heard me telling Professor Kees Boerma—of the Chair of Ethics, you know—that Teunis Spykhoven was back.

"Young Spykhoven!" Vanden Heuvel had an air of maddening superiority. "Oh, he was sure to turn up sooner or later—bad pennies always do. I could have told you he'd appear on the scene again;—flat, I venture to guess."

I couldn't deny it. Teunis had certainly not come back the conquering hero of romance.

"His kind always do. Know more than their elders. Despise honest hard work; no sense of discipline."

I laughed—couldn't help it. Suddenly the

scene came back to me of Vanden Heuvel and his committee in the boy's room; I knew very well that it had been discussed frequently with gusto by the students and even by some of the faculty members and their wives—"and he said to Vanden Heuvel, right to his face, 'Oh, tell him to go to hell!' "

Vanden Heuvel flushed. He, too, was not unconscious of the subterranean gossip on the campus. . . . To Kees, giving an elaborate appearance of an aside:

"Of course, we all know he's a sort of protégé of Bakkerzeel; Bakkerzeel in fact believes he's a genius. Said so right out in faculty meeting. But—" He raised his eyebrows humorously, maddeningly, so that I saw red for a moment.

"But I forgot, Boerma, he's your cousin or something, isn't he?"

Professor Kees laughed. "Only by adoption."

I could have killed him for that. He said no more than those three words, "Only by adoption," but I knew at that moment how Tante Sarah must have felt when people compared the successful Kees with the no-account Teunis. Oh, if professorial dignity had not prevented me from rubbing complacent Professor Kees's complacent face in the dirt at my feet!

The sting of their scorn stayed with me.

"But what are your plans, Teunis?" Our friendship had advanced to the stage of my calling him that. He was sitting in my easy-chair again, smoking a short briar pipe.

He looked at me a little doubtfully.

"Write," he said at last laconically.

"Yes, I know." The memory of Kees's success made me impatient. "But aren't you going to *do* something?"

He laughed at my earnestness. "I heaved freight at the boat dock all day and have got enough to tide me over for a week!"

What could I do or say in the face of such cheerful acceptance of whatever life gave him?

He told me about "Everglades," and there was no lack of enthusiastic earnestness in his voice now. I got the ridiculous impression that he considered it more important than Kees's position at the college or even more important than the presidency of that institution. (Parenthetically I may say that I had begun to aim for that again.)

I stopped him in his impetuous rush.

"But, Teunis—poetry! You must know that that isn't—well—practicable. That was all right for the Elizabethans. They could make a liv-

ing out of it. But this harking back to earlier standards—the Elizabethan drama—the poetic drama: it doesn't 'go' any more. Even Stephen Phillips can't make it 'go'—not in the sense of a career in it."

I knew practically nothing about contemporary dramatists and poets, despising them, for their contemporaneity. Phillips was the only example I could cite. He had stuck in my mind somehow.

To my surprise, Teunis was full of scorn for him. To say truth, my knowledge of him was extremely superficial. Oh, the man was a poet, Teunis admitted, but he wasn't a dramatist. There was a world of difference. His stuff wouldn't act. He, Teunis, was going to write stuff that would act. Not for nothing had he spent three years in the theater. There's where even Browning and the others had made their mistake: their stuff was poetry, but it wouldn't act.

And then he took another tack. Of course it was all wrong to go back to the Elizabethans. It simply couldn't be done. He wasn't trying. But he didn't see any reason why poetry and drama shouldn't go together to-day as much as it had done in the days of the Armada.

He talked a good deal about *vers libre*. It was before the days of "The Spoon River Anthology" and I was of course full of scorn for a school of poetry I had not read. "Free verse" was the fruit of feeble-mindedness, I said dogmatically.

Teunis's laugh actually exasperated me a little.

"Of course, Mr. Bakkerzeel, my stuff isn't all free verse. That would be—well—artificial. But there's no harm in using it when it seems to fit the theme."

We quarreled for a while. But I needn't go into that. Teunis easily had the best of it, though I wouldn't admit it. I came back to the bread-and-butter issue.

"But there's no career in it, Teunis. It's all well and good for a man of independent means, but—"

I didn't finish. Teunis laughed with the irresponsibility of youth.

"Oh, there'll always be freight to heave, or something else like that."

I gave it up, a sense of defeat coming over me. Had it been marketable fiction he was proposing to write, I might have considered the plan a trifle less mad. In my dense ignorance of the qualifications necessary to produce marketable

fiction, I might have felt that it was not entirely hopeless. But poetic drama!—*poetic* drama!

Esther was away when Teunis returned—at some conference or something, and remained away for three weeks. She broke in on one of our discussions about *vers libre*.

She was full of her usual breezy cheerfulness; she joked Teunis about his having got thin of homesickness.

“Of course,” in a pretended aside to me, “we all look like poky stick-in-the-muds to a world traveler like him—nothing romantic about us, Mr. Bakkerzeel,—oh, dear!”

Teunis laughed at his own expense. He accepted her good-natured chaff in the spirit in which Esther obviously intended it. But I noticed that he was not very talkative. She had to urge him to tell about his “adventures.” He protested that he had written her all about them.

Esther laughed scornfully:

“All about them! Mr. Bakkerzeel can bear me out that you gave mighty little information.”

I fear I went a little white when the girl told of our arrangement. Teunis looked at me with a new interest in his eyes. I said something ner-

vously about old-womanish curiosity being my besetting sin. But my nervousness was entirely unnecessary. Teunis was not thinking of me.

When Esther got up to go he reached for his hat. Then *he* hesitated nervously. Esther laughed.

"Just like a bashful school-boy waiting at the church door. Certainly, Teunis, you may see me safe home. I need a protector along these dangerous, brilliantly lighted streets!"

I did not see Teunis again for perhaps a week. He was understood to be locked up in his tiny bedroom at work on "Everglades." Then one night he appeared at my door again.

"I'm going to work, Mr. Bakkerzeel," he said almost before he had seated himself in the easy-chair I held out for him.

CHAPTER V

WE discussed ways and means into the small hours. It was a Friday night and I didn't care about time; next day there would be no classes, only a batch of examination papers that could wait. And as for Teunis, he didn't know what it was to worry about late hours; he doesn't to-day. He's one of the most unsystematic creatures I have ever met. So my green-shaded lamp kept on burning shamelessly.

"But what are your plans, Teunis?" Thus I, unconscious of having used identically the same words on a previous occasion.

But Teunis had no plans. I dragged out the professions in review. He couldn't teach. Though in most respects a far better educated man than I or Kees or any of the rest of our little educational union, he didn't hold a union card, so to speak. He had never graduated from any school. His education was considered to be underdone.

And the same obstacle stood in the way of his practice of any of the other professions. Not one of them could make use of the peculiar brand of haphazard education that Teunis Spykhoven

had acquired. No matter that that education was broader than the neat formula-bound training for any of the recognized professions: it simply couldn't be used and that was the end of it.

Teunis regarded me ruefully. I'm convinced this was the first time in his life that he had seriously thought of any profession with reference to himself.

"Now who would have thought that I was as ignorant as all that?" He laughed, but he was not as light-hearted about it as he tried to make me believe he was.

It was East Nassau all over again; at least so it seemed to Teunis in his young intolerance. East Nassau had had a set of definite formulæ of life with which it had wanted to tie him down. East Nassau didn't have any wings and hence it had come to the conclusion that there were no wings, or if there were, they were of the devil and should be clipped. And to his amazement Teunis found that that held good for the rest of the world. Oh, yes, poetry was all right and all that, but a man has to be practical, don't you know. The world stood ready to accord Teunis Spykhoven a certain amount of honor and reward, as East Nassau had stood

ready to do, provided he agreed to live up to the rules.

It was all well and good for Teunis to say, "I'm going to work," but in sober reality there wasn't any work for him to do. Oh, I would have counted it the greatest blessing life could give to have been allowed to advance him the money with which he might train himself for a definite profession, but neither Teunis nor I was so blind as to think that that was a real way out. He might have trained for a hundred professions and he wouldn't have been able to make his living at one of them. Every one of the professions I held up to him for review he regarded with a loathing that made it utterly hopeless.

"I'm no good, I guess, Mr. Bakkerzeel—except to heave freight."

He no longer possessed the light-hearted irresponsibility of a week ago. He was clearly despondent now. But what could I do, short of giving him money outright? And that was out of the question.

Teunis was worldly-wise enough to understand that "Everglades" or anything else that might follow it would not be likely to solve his bread-and-butter problems for a long time to come. Not for nothing had he spent three years

in the theater. The *poetic* drama! Managers would laugh at it. No matter how well his plays might act, it would be assumed *a priori* that they would not act, and they wouldn't get a chance to be tried out. Oh, yes, later, perhaps, in the vague future, some accident or some lucky circumstance might give him his chance. But he was up against the immediate future now. No matter how the world might honor the *made* poet, the poet in the making was to it a newspaper caricature, a thing to be ridiculed into conformity with common-sense, practical things. Who ever hears of a boy in his senses proclaiming to the world, "I'm going to be a poet," as he might say, "I'm going to be an engineer or a doctor or a lawyer," and being taken seriously? If he has such ambition he keeps it dark, conscious of the snickers of his elders. . . .

The upshot of it all was that Teunis found a job on the "Morning Eagle" after several weeks of hesitation. The newspaper seemed the only profession in which such training as he had had could be immediately used, and the irregular hours and the night work appealed to Teunis.

CHAPTER VI

DE STAD, like many a larger city, boasted its "newspaper row." Why the city's three dailies were huddled together in a single block has never been explained to me, but the plants of the "News" and the "Eagle" had only a wall between, and these two were separated from the home of the "Post" only by a narrow confectionery store. While the papers frequently abused one another in print, Teunís understood after a day or two that the different offices were on the friendliest possible terms. The men were constantly foregathering in one or another of the local rooms after hours, or, better still, in Sweeny's basement saloon, where they did a great deal more talking than drinking.

No man was spared at these "conferences." The young men knew all about Mayor Sanborn's "affair" with a certain Mrs. Buzzard, and the pompous official's pompous statements in print were dissected with roars of laughter and to the accompaniment of various and sundry "damns" and "Gods." There were rare tales about Mrs. Harriet Mulvaney and Mrs. Austin Overton and Mrs. Jimsie Van Olds,

three of the most prominent of De Stad's "four hundred." A minister or two were said to take a "nip" whenever they went to another town where they wouldn't be recognized.

"The Old Man" of the "News" and "the Chief" of the "Post" and "Old Stark" of the "Eagle" were not spared altogether, but their individual weaknesses and failings were almost affectionately rolled under the tongues of the young men; and said young men knew, or at least claimed to know, an amazingly large number of the less admirable idiosyncrasies of their elders in the profession. And neither did they spare one another. Before he had been with the "Eagle" a week, Teunis knew pretty well who of his confrères had a "rep" for being spoony, who had a weakness for poker, who "souped" to the Old Man, who became "weepy" when drunk and who "ugly." Young Pelham was constantly being twitted with being verbose; it was said that he could n't tell the story of a "drunk" being locked up without writing a book about it. "Hanks"—Teunis never learned the boy's real name—had a reputation for moralizing: he would never grow into a newspaper man—could not hope to do anything more than write editorials, said his cocksure

companions, and they had a most well-developed contempt for all writers of editorials.

It was in many ways a strange new world for Teunis Spykhoven, and if the truth were known, I suspect that it was all the more fascinating because the men were not attaching too much importance to their work. They were continually damning the newspaper profession as a "hell of a game"; it was never as if they were on the bottom rung of a ladder and looking up, girding themselves for a painstaking climb. That attitude would have frightened Teunis. They were very worldly-wise young fellows with an itch for writing. It was well known that two of them had written a novel apiece—unpublished!—and there were some one-act plays and a number of short stories—all, by some strange fate, unproduced and unpublished. They boasted a good deal of how they were going to take the world by storm, and they were more cocksure in their literary criticism than ever professional critic would dare to be. Teunis's innocent statement one day that European fiction showed much better workmanship than the work of American story-tellers was greeted with howls of derision.

"We can beat 'em with our eyes shut!"

shouted Pelham, meaning of course "we Americans." "They're so damn long-winded they never really get started." And he went on at rather great length himself comparing Jack London and Rex Beach and Chambers with Thackeray and Dickens—seemingly under the impression that nothing had been written in England or on the Continent since their day.

Still strange to his surroundings, Teunis urged somewhat diffidently the claims of Conrad and Galsworthy and Romain Rolland. But he was shouted down. Who the hell cared to jaw about "dead ones"?

But the next day he learned that the title of "The Professor" had been coined for him. He had been put down as a high-brow. It was a bad start. But worse was to come. It became known, almost accidentally, for he was a little shy about speaking of it himself, that he was writing a poetic drama. They catechized him.

"Like Shakespeare?"

"Good Lord, no, nothing like that." He saw no way out but to answer their questions as best he could.

"But regular poetry—Juno and Minerva and 'out, damned spot' and 'dewy-fingered morn' and all that sort of thing?"

Teunis laughed, embarrassed. What was there to say?

They regarded him as an outlandish curiosity—not at all awed, highly amused. The man who admitted an ambition like that must be slightly “cracked.” He was fair game—a poet, by God!

After that Teunis kept his mouth carefully shut about his work—his real work, as he always secretly thought of it. He was keenly sensitive to ridicule and he smarted under the amused comment of the “boys.”

But perhaps it would have been better for him had he talked about his play freely. They all discounted a great deal what everybody else said. When Pelham boasted that his new novel would “knock the socks off” anything that had been published so far, everybody agreed good-humoredly and said privately that they were not such poor fish as to swallow it in good faith. If Teunis had talked much they might have set him down for a “bug” on the subject, but in time they would very likely have learned to disbelieve most of it and have counted him not “such a bad little old bug when you get down to him.”

But this unaccounted-for silence puzzled them, and it exasperated them a little. What

the devil was the matter with him to crawl into his shell? Couldn't he stand a little gaff? They got the impression from his failure to boast that he was actually in earnest about this poet business. A man might be a "bug" on a subject and still be a good fellow, but a silent, unboastful, honest-to-God, in earnest "bug"—Lord!

They ended up by denominating him "Shakespeare"; that nickname quickly took the place of "The Professor."

At the end of three months on the "Eagle" he found himself anything but popular with the young men of that paper. And the same thing held good for the staffs of the "Post" and the "News." For the most part they "couldn't see much of anything to him," and he had unconsciously developed a stand-offish attitude. Also, he said sharp things now and again, as when he called Pelham a "professional vampire in pants" because of his alleged success—by his own report—with "the girls"; and when, stung to reprisal, he told Shaffer, the college graduate, that his conception of English literature was about as comprehensive as a flea's idea of the circulation of the blood.

Later in my bachelor rooms he always did penance for such outbursts.

"But I can't help it somehow, Mr. Bakker-zeel; I guess my temper's getting ugly."

I laughed this off. But I felt more uneasy than I cared to show. It was patent that Teunis was not "getting on" in his work. And I suspected there was another reason than the ridicule of his fellows for the ugliness of his temper. He never said a word about his work, but I guessed that he loathed it. I didn't dare call the subject on the carpet; I was so desperately anxious that he should make good at it. It would have been so satisfying to throw him into the face of Vanden Heuvel and gloat over his success. But I soon lost hope of that. Whenever I soberly sat down to take stock I was forced to admit that in unvarnished reality Vanden Heuvel had all the facts on his side; Teunis Spykhoven was not showing that he had the "stuff" in him. But I shrank from that verdict as final.

What made Teunis perhaps more bitter than any one other thing was that "Everglades" lay neglected. He had dreamed of getting on with that during off hours, but somehow he could not remain *en rapport* with the poem. I comforted him. Later when he had settled down in his job a little more securely he would learn to get back to creative writing.

Teunis did not answer. But there was a look of hopelessness in his eyes and I said no more.

Gradually Pelham and Teunis differentiated themselves from the group as enemies. With all the advantage on Pelham's side. For some unaccountable reason he was popular in spite of his boasting. And later Teunis admitted that on the whole he wasn't such a bad chap. But for the time being the two were fire and gunpowder to each other, Teunis, it must in all fairness be admitted, contributing his full share to increasing the friction.

Pelham was on the "News," and it was in the local room of that paper one afternoon that fire and powder came together in an explosion. I don't know clearly what was the immediate reason for the fight, but the result of it was a broken chair, a smashed desk-light, an overturned typewriter, and a broken finger on Pelham's part.

Shaffer, also of the "News," wrote it up for that paper's funny column, making the most of Teunis's dramatic ambitions. "The Pugnacious Poet" it was headed, and in a mixture of verse and prose the public was given the story of the fistic exploits of this "latter-day Shakespeare." The next day Sam Giles, the cartoonist of the

"Post," a close friend of Shaffer and Pelham, did the incident in a narrow strip of pictures at the bottom of the sport page, also labeling them "The Pugnacious Poet."

Teunis himself laughed about it.

"It *was* pretty foolish to get into a rumpus like that," he admitted to me. "Well, he got a broken finger out of it and I—I guess I'm getting some notoriety!"

I winced, a swift mental vision flashing across my mind of how Vanden Heuvel might at that moment be gloating over the strip of pictures. And East Nassau! They would see it, for by one of those diabolical coincidences that cannot be explained in any rational way, there was a cut of Kees Boerma in the same issue of the "Post": Kees was to give an address on "Ethics—Its Philosophy and Practice" before the Civic Club.

But for the moment I forgot how the notoriety Teunis had laughed at would affect some one else.

. It was Thursday the next day and I was still keeping up the practice of paying a weekly visit to Esther's office, though all excuse for it had been taken away by Teunis's return home.

She reserved reference to the incident till the very last. When I was about ready to go she came to it.

"He doesn't seem to—to—well, hit his stride yet as a newspaper man, Mr. Bakkerzeel."

It was the usual matter-of-fact Esther-like tone. We had talked of his "career" once or twice, and I knew she was interested, but it was a businesslike interest—almost an interest in success as an abstraction. I knew her well enough now to twit her sometimes on her worship of success. There was nothing unusual in her manner of referring to Teunis now. That is, there would not have been if she hadn't suddenly held out her box of cigars to me with the laughing invitation, "Have one!"

I "had one," but I was conscious of a curious sense of tension as I lighted it. Was there trouble in those confident eyes and was that the reason why she did not look at me? Also, the ceremony of lighting the cigar prevented talk for a moment. And then she fumbled with the lock of the drawer to which she returned the box of cigars. This also consumed time.

But the next moment I saw her laughter through the smoke—the same untroubled face that I knew so well, with no shadow on it.

That night in my lonely bachelor rooms I
talked aloud to myself:

“You fool! You old woman! You old match-
making fool!”

CHAPTER VII

IF Teunis Spykhoven had been the hero in a story he would at this point have converted defeat into victory. The formula was ready to hand for it, laid down in a thousand magazine plots—everything against him, but his energy and ingenuity and resourcefulness leading him to an achievement that breaks down all opposition and wins him his reward. It is always the green horse that wins the dramatic race, not the favorite of the book-makers; always the uncouth youth from the country who makes a spectacular business success, never the son of a long line of bankers; always the cub reporter who ferrets out a scoop, never the seasoned newspaper man. A spectacular piece of work, tense, dramatic, full of action, crowded with human interest—black headlines across the page—big political upheaval perhaps—an exposé worked up single-handed under the very noses of all the other reporters—the big story signed with his name in twelve-point—an interview with “Old Stark”—“Good stuff, my boy, you’re the city editor from now on!”—

success, triumph, object of envy—name on every man's tongue!

No matter that in real life it doesn't work that way, I will not deny the fact that I was fatuously hoping for something like that for Teunis. Reason told me that the cub reporter does not achieve nearly so many scoops as the story-tellers would seem to believe, but that did not prevent me from hoping. It seemed the only way of making Teunis a "success," and I couldn't bear to think of him as "falling down" and earning the still deeper scorn of the Vanden Heuvels and Keeses of this world.

And it wasn't for want of an opportunity that Teunis did not live up to the picture. He and "Hanks" were covering police court that morning. They yawned through the string of "drunks" and "vags," with a prostitute for variety now and then—not one of them worth more than five lines of type. "Hanks" was there for the "News" and Teunis for the "Eagle." The "Post" being a morning paper, its police reporter was not on duty.

"But we might as well be snoozing like Weeks for all there's doing here this A.M.," was "Hanks's" verdict. And wishing to go out for a game of billiards, he asked Teunis to cover the

remaining cases for him. The young men of the city's three papers frequently accommodated one another in that way.

But "Hanks" did not see Teunis again that day; not that it mattered greatly, as he could get all he needed from the judge's docket and the boss none the wiser. Nevertheless he was slightly uneasy. Was it possible that "Shakespeare" had something up his sleeve? But the last edition of the "Eagle" appeared with nothing the "News" didn't have, so "Hanks" breathed easy again.

And soon after the paper went to press it became known in the local room of the "News" that "Shakespeare," after having been out all day and not having turned in a single "stickful" of copy, had suddenly reappeared and had apparently been dumfounded when he learned that the last edition of the "Eagle" had already been "put to bed."

"He caught a calling-down from Madison, old Shakespeare did—Lord, how the old boy did call him!" young Billy Pont reported to the local room of the "News." "He all but fired him, and Shakespeare couldn't get it through his noddle what he'd done. It was too funny to see his face."

Weeks of the "Post," after his day's sleep, was foregathering with the others in the "News" local room, before beginning his day's work next door at five o'clock in the afternoon. Having a sharp nose for news, he scented something in all this, but he kept his own counsel.

A short time later he looked Teunis up at his boarding-house. Weeks was cordial, and Teunis, sore and embittered after his "calling" from the city editor, was abnormally grateful. In many ways he was like a child hungering for sympathy, and he smarted constantly under his unpopularity. Every time they called him "Shakespeare" he winced.

So he made a clean breast of his day's adventures to Weeks.

"It was the man's habit of putting his hand to his breast and then to his eyes that gave me the notion he wasn't an ordinary vag," Teunis was narrating.

"Why?" from Weeks, mystified.

"Eye-glasses; 'd you ever notice how many that wear 'em have a habit of taking them off and putting 'em on again?"

But even granting that, Weeks didn't see the connection. As is the case with most of the rest of us plodders, Weeks's imagination was at fault.

"But don't you *see*—eye-glasses! An ordinary vag, a chronic vag, doesn't wear eye-glasses— isn't an eye-glasses man—hasn't the habit of taking 'em off and on."

Teunis was tremendously interested, excited even, but Weeks had but little power of visualization. However, he granted the theory.

So Teunis followed the man out when the judge discharged him, forgetting his promise to "Hanks," forgetting his obligation to the city editor of the "Eagle." But it wasn't until he had got the man slightly drunk again that he got his story out of him, and that took time.

"He took straight whiskey," Teunis went on, "but he could carry an enormous load."

Weeks was still considerably mystified. If "Shakespeare" had landed a good story, why didn't he turn it in? Or if he had got it too late for that day's last edition, why was he telling him, Weeks, about it who could scoop him in the next morning's "Post"?

"You see, Weeks, I wanted to find out how it feels to have been wealthy and respected and powerful—to have been looked up to, quoted as an authority, name often in the newspapers—on the boards of directors—vestryman in the church, and all that sort of thing, and then

change over suddenly and become an ordinary sort of a vag who is run in on a drunk charge."

Teunis said it as if in answer to Weeks's unspoken question.

"I wanted to know what kind of thoughts such a man has; how he feels when sober. Does he continue to read the stock reports out of mere habit? Is he really as repentant at times as many writers would have us believe, or is he happier on the whole than in the old life?—In short, all about him—how he feels, what he thinks."

Weeks said nothing; he was more mystified than ever.

"Had been on the lookout for just such a man a long time, and this one was a beautiful case." An exultant note stole into Teunis's voice.

"Who was he—what was his name?" Weeks came back to essentials.

It was Teunis's turn to be mystified. But only for a moment.

"A fat chance I'd have had to get anything out of him if I'd tried to pry into the facts of his past: he would have shut up like a clam. But he told me he'd been in a line that compelled him to think in millions. Then his wife went back

on him—another man in the case—hushed up and all that kind of thing. But he thought so much of her he couldn't stand it, so dropped out, and here he is."

"And you didn't pump him to get a story?" Weeks was suddenly aglow.

Teunis shook his head. In all frankness he had to admit to himself that the idea of getting a newspaper story out of the "millionaire vag," as Weeks called the man, had never occurred to him. He had wanted the information for "Solitude," the idea for which had been vaguely buzzing about in his head a long time. To-day it had become something definite, alive, quivering, crying out to be written. And its creator-to-be was exultant. This day was a red-letter day in the calendar of his life. A story for the "Eagle"? To hell with the "Eagle"!

Though Weeks did not understand what Teunis was after, he guessed shrewdly that "Shakespeare" wouldn't make any trouble. So he was almost ultra-honorable. Did Teunis care if he, Weeks, dug up some more out of the "millionaire vag" and used it for the next morning's "Post"? Weeks was told to "go to it." Teunis was only too glad of the opportunity to confer a favor.

And how big a favor it was appeared the next morning. Weeks had not made the mistake of developing the scoop alone. He took Williamson, the "Post's" star "feature man," into partnership.

And the next morning's "Post" screamed the story. The first page was plastered with it, crowding out even the report of the fight in Congress on the harbors bill in which De Stad was deeply interested.

Solved—Nation-wide Mystery—Baffled the Whole Country's Secret Service for Eight Months—Solved by the "Morning Post"!—W. K. Weston Located! Telegrams to the man's family set in a box in black-face; lengthy replies in the same type; exclamation marks; bouquets and more bouquets thrown by the "Post" at itself; estimates that the Weston Corporation in New York had spent one hundred thousand dollars to find its president since his sudden disappearance eight months ago; and then some more encomiums by the "Post" on the "Post's" enterprise; and on an inside page the cuts of Weeks and Williamson who had solved the mystery of "the Millionaire Vag."

Somehow it became known in the local room of the "News" and of the "Eagle" that Weeks

had obtained his tip from "Shakespeare." Perhaps Weeks talked too much when he celebrated his triumph in Sweeny's basement saloon. The rest of the boys snickered when "Shakespeare" was summoned into the office of "Old Stark."

"Old Stark" catechized Teunis minutely; every minute of the previous day had to be accounted for. Teunis understood what was coming and he took almost a savage pleasure in being frank. If he was to be fired anyway, it was at least something to rub it in that the "Eagle" had been so near the "Millionaire Vag" mystery solution and yet had missed it.

"And so you knew all about it?" Stark's tone had a hard ring.

"Not *all*, Mr. Stark—only what I've told you."

The other ignored this.

"And then, knowing about it, you couldn't keep a quiet tongue in your head—had to go and spill it, like a gossipy old woman!"

This stung and Teunis's hands clenched themselves.

"You're a hell of a newspaper man, I must say!"

And then "Old Stark" broke loose. But Teunis did not attempt a defense. He knew it was all

true from Stark's viewpoint, and, moreover, he was more than reconciled to being "fired." Not until now, with freedom in sight, had he fully realized how he loathed the work. He wanted to finish "Everglades" and then begin on "Solitude." He smiled inwardly while Stark stormed, then he forgot to listen. He laughed softly to himself.

And that laugh transformed Stark into a wild beast. Laugh at him, Stark—laugh!

“Get the hell out of here or I'll throw you out!” he shouted, so loud that the “boys” in the local room, hearing, snickered. “Shakespeare,” they told one another, raising their voices above the roar of the presses in the basement, was being given some first-hand material, served up hot, for a new poetic drama!

CHAPTER VIII

IF I had not been so busy with my own affairs at this time I might have been able to help Teunis Spykhoven to something else. Even as it was, I made one or two half-hearted attempts, but Teunis himself stood in the way of their success. He was distinctly not what we refer to when we speak of "an enterprising young man," I was reluctantly compelled to admit. Here he was, twenty-five years old—a time of life when most men have already mapped out their careers, but he was as undecided and as much at sea as ever. Kees Boerma, his cousin, but six months older, was already making a name for himself. Teunis was still drifting like an irresponsible school-boy, and few knew him who did not believe that he would never cast anchor.

It seemed hopeless enough to all of us during the weeks following his dismissal from the staff of the "Eagle," but no more hopeless to any than to Teunis himself. He wanted to be a "success" in our acceptation of the term, wanted it desperately, but while the rest of us deluded ourselves with the hope that some time he would stumble on something that would

"bring out what there was in him," Teunis had no such hope to sustain him. He not only was a failure; he felt himself a failure.

He no longer went to see Esther, too ashamed to face her. While on the "Eagle" he had taken her to the theater occasionally and they had made two or three excursions to the Island off the dunes of East Nassau, in memory of the old days. But Teunis understood, without being told, that all that was at an end now. So decidedly a success herself, Esther, it seemed to him, could only despise failure. So he left off going to see her.

For which I was not sorry. It was hopeless in any event, and the sooner Teunis realized it the better it would be for him. I understood that it was not I but Esther who was responsible for his going to work, but only a person blinded by a hopeless passion could have read the least indication of sentiment in her attitude. She was the good comrade, friendly, companionable. But too businesslike for love. Her voice never faltered, her eyes never wavered from her own affairs. She was just Esther and that was the end of it. Teunis would simply have to learn this.

He fell into a state of such profound depres-

sion that it frightened me, harassed though I was with my own plans for the capture of the presidency of the college. The freedom that had seemed so alluring in the office of "Old Stark" while he, Teunis, was in the process of being "fired," proved dead-sea fruit. Now that he had it he could n't use it. He was haunted by his sense of being a failure and by the necessity of "making good" in the ordinary channels of success before he could finish "Everglades" and take up "Solitude," and they lay neglected.

It was a case of positive mental ill health, I realize now. The thought of suicide was almost never absent from his mind, he confessed to me later. Why not walk off the Hammond Company's dock and be done with it once for all? It would be very simple. At night when the Chicago boat had left and the lights on the dock had been turned out, he could simply shut his eyes and walk into space!

I have often wondered if it was instinct, the instinct to sanity and wholesomeness strong in him, that caused him to choose the job he next took up.

He became the hired man of a truck farmer just outside of the city limits!

Even I could not repress a smile when he told

me about it, but though he had been at the new work less than a week I saw that already he was returning to mental health.

He learned to love the earth—the warm black muck that, like a generous mother, produces the onions, the cabbages, the carrots. He loved to run his fingers through the loose soil. He loved to stretch his vital young body, clothed in blue-jeans and “jacket,” lengthwise between the trenches of celery and to imbibe vitality from the soil—the warm sun beating down on his back, a light breeze caressing his hair and cooling the beads of sweat on his neck.

For he made one of the greatest discoveries of his life now: that there was inspiration for him in close contact with the soil. The splendid pictures that culture clubs and ladies with bejeweled fingers have since exclaimed over and that professional critics have painstakingly but futilely subjected to intellectual analysis, had their origin, many of them, in an onion patch!

The job with the truck farmer was understood to be an interim. That being granted, Teunis could even go to see Esther again. The fiction was revived between them that he would some day become a “success,” and Teunis was fatuous enough to believe in his rosy dreams.

But he had not reckoned with the fact that he had become a "character" to the young men of the newspapers. They did not discover him for some weeks, but when they did!

"Our own Shakespeare a truck farmer, by God!" They rolled the bit of news under their tongues appreciatively in Sweeny's basement saloon.

"The peerless poet in a potato patch," declaimed Pelham alliteratively, as if it were the title of a story.

And their imaginations having been stirred, the young men of the "Eagle" and of the "Post" and of the "News" hastened to share their fun with the public. "Shakespeare" figured comically in the funny columns, and the creator of "The Pugnacious Poet" began a series of single-column cartoons in which the aggressive being of the earlier "strip" had become extremely docile among his onions, radishes, turnips, and cabbages.

With the result that before long Teunis Spyk-hoven awoke to the fact that he had become a "character," not only in the local rooms of the newspapers, but to the general public. It was the aftermath of a newspaper career.

"Like poor eyesight after scarlet fever," he

smiled, but I was not unconscious of a certain bitterness in his tone. Even I did not realize how hungry he was for sympathy, for a little praise, a little assurance that he was being understood a very little at least. Ridicule was like a searing iron to him. Deep down in his heart he had always known that his life was dedicated to a high worship. And hitherto he had kept his spiritual vows. East Nassau had not understood him and he had repudiated it; and now the rest of the world was only a larger East Nassau.

His notoriety enjoyed rapid spread. Coming home on the interurban I overheard the comment of two workingmen on the seat ahead of me: "They're at this queer freak of a poet again." A new cartoon of "The Pugnacious Poet" incubated the remark.

"So I see. . . . Me an' Jake had an argument the other day about how to pronounce his name—moniker as big a freak as the man himself, say I."

"Good alias, but what's the gink's *real* name?"

"That *is* his real name," a business man (presumably, judging from his clothes) broke into the conversation. "Anyway, you've got to

hand it to him for cooking up something original. Weeding onions is something I've never seen tried before by any moon-eyed sentimentalist. Usually a poet puts in his time making love to another man's wife!"

And a week or two later I was an unwilling listener to the tail-end of a conversation that also evidently referred to Teunis Spykhoven, though his name was not mentioned. It was at a concert at the Harmony Club.

"For goodness' sake," I heard a feminine voice, "I don't see why they don't put that lunatic in an asylum and have done with him. Poet!"—infinite contempt in her tone; "it's positively sacrilegious to call that being a poet."

Though I could not see the speaker I could imagine her contemptuously turning up her cultured nose.

And I realized how hard it would be for Teunis, under such circumstances, to hew out for himself a career in De Stad, had he been never so enterprising. And the prospect of having him driven out again to become a wanderer on the face of the earth, as he once had been, gave me a sensation of cold numbness that for the first time revealed to me how deeply I had grown attached to him.

It so happened that I did not see Esther for two or three weeks. But when I paid my usual visit to her office again on a Thursday afternoon I had the curious illusion that her eyes grew hard as soon as I mentioned Teunis.

But on thinking it over later at night I set myself down for a fool. After my bachelor manner I talked to myself:

“Her eyes hard—nonsense! You’d better go and have your own eyes examined.”

CHAPTER IX

TEUNIS SPYKHOVEN's experience as a man of finance would have been amusing if it had not been so tragic to me at the time. It was the winter after his summer on the truck farm. Through Rhodes, a friend, cashier of the Fifth National Bank, I found him a place in that institution. He lasted just three weeks. Rhodes met me on the street.

"Good Lord, Bakkerzeel, what did you want to load *him* on me for?" There was a twinkle in the banker's eye. Evidently he thought it a kind of a practical joke, but I fear I didn't rise to the humor of it.

"Couldn't you try him out a little longer?"

But Rhodes refused to be serious. He laughed.

"Oh, anything to please you, but I fear I couldn't induce your poetical protégé to remain with me. In fact he fired me, not I him."

I looked blank, to the banker's still further amusement.

"Told me he'd as lief be buried alive as stay in my living tomb another day. He's bright enough, but I'm afraid his genius doesn't lie in the direction of finance."

There was a flavor of mild irony in the words. Even Rhodes had not remained unaffected by the ridicule that had been heaped upon Teunis. . . .

Two or three other positions were tried with but very indifferent success. In the end he obtained a job—it could not be dignified by the word “position”—in the Tandem Bindery. It was piece-work and Teunis amazed the whole office force by his speed. He broke several records of the plant in “assembling,” and his pay—not salary—was larger than he had ever enjoyed before. He was unusually quick with his hands, and “assembling” required nothing else than deftness and speed with the fingers. It was as nearly an automatic operation as any physical motion can be. It required no mental attention.

His pay check at the end of the week was larger than he could have hoped for in most of the “positions” which I had induced him to try out. It was seldom less than eighteen dollars and sometimes between twenty and twenty-one dollars. On the “Eagle” his “salary” had been twelve dollars, and if he had remained long enough to become city editor he might have risen to the dizzy heights of twenty dollars a week. In the bank he had been earning ten dol-

lars for each week's work, and promotions in banks are notoriously slow. Even his cousin Kees Boerma—Kees Boerma, Professor of Ethics at Christian College, Kees Boerma the successful, the man with a career, always pointed out as being everything Teunis should have been—even Kees was earning only one thousand dollars a year, slightly less than twenty dollars a week; after several years he would receive twelve hundred dollars, and after many years more he might climb to fourteen hundred dollars, which was as high as any one could go at Christian College.

But knowing all that did not prevent me from being almost insanely jealous of Kees Boerma on behalf of Teunis. Kees after all was earning a "salary"; Teunis was receiving "pay." Kees had a "position"; Teunis had a "job."

But the curious fact is that during his newspaper days, his banking days, and his other "position" days, Teunis Spykhoven wrote hardly a line; while "assembling" in the Tandem Bindery he wrote the exquisitely comic closing act of "Everglades" and the first two acts of "Solitude."

"I can compose while I work," he explained to me; "all I need to do at night is write the

stuff down. The motion of my hands seems to stimulate my mind."

He was full of hope, enthusiastic. I seemed to see "Success" in large letters written on his face. His notoriety would wear off in time, he said, sanguine as usual. The "boys" would forget him, and meanwhile he was going to work—his synonym for "write," I understood. In the spring he would go back to the truck farmer for the summer, and next winter he would return to the Tandem Bindery; there would always be a place for him there, the foreman had said. He seemed to think that he was doing pretty well, that all his occupational problems were solved, and he seemed to plume himself a little on his ability to meet practical problems in a practical, businesslike way.

But it was a crestfallen Teunis who came to my rooms one evening about a week later. I did not get out of him then what was the trouble; all he gave me to understand was that the world was out of joint, a planet inhabited by fools and he himself the prize fool of them all! He was in the dumps, possessed by blue devils. But I got the story later, piecemeal, part from him, part from Esther, but so fully that I seem to have been present.

He had taken Esther to the theater, and afterwards he came with her into her little parlor to help her make chocolate in a chafing-dish. Perhaps it was the unaccustomed air of domesticity about her in the large apron she had put on to protect her gown; perhaps it was the deftness of her hands; perhaps it was something in the liquid softness of her eyes; perhaps it was the grace and charm of the whole of her as she stood delicately slicing a square of chocolate into the chafing-dish—Esther suddenly seemed *possible* to Teunis. His head swam. He stood near her and he trembled so violently that it seemed impossible she could be unaware of it.

But she was fully intent on scraping the chocolate, her lower lip caught slightly between her even teeth, a shadowy furrow of concentration between her eyes.

Teunis noted all this as if from a vast distance and there was an unnatural roaring in his ears. He stretched out his arm and mechanically withdrew it again. Then he looked away, and when he turned to her again he was amazed to see she was still scraping the square of chocolate. He had a strange feeling of their having stood thus statue-like for many minutes, holding the pose as in a tableau, and he could not

understand the girl's complete unconsciousness of constraint. She merely scraped chocolate; he was taking a journey through hell—or heaven, he didn't know which.

And an eternity later—or was it the ninetieth part of a second?—he found her in his arms. And during a whole delirious moment—how long is a moment?—he felt her yielding, felt the greedy lurch of her body toward him, felt her arms quivering in search of him, one hand clutching the square of chocolate, the other the little sharp paring-knife. For a moment—just long enough to be definitely apprehended—he thought he was in heaven. Then—he knew he was in hell. . . .

A short time later they were talking. There was space enough between them now. Esther stood, her hands on the back of a chair, but not at all with the air of using it for support. Teunis half sat, half leaned for support on a stout little table, on which lay scattered a few books, one of which he had mechanically picked up and which he was now turning over and over in his hands. The chocolate was forgotten.

“No, Teunis, not now or—ever.” The voice was not unkindly, but it was very, very firm. Esther-like, the girl had complete control of

herself. It was in answer to something said by Teunis, of course.

Teunis turning the book over in his hands said nothing. He knew Esther well enough to understand that she meant exactly what she was saying—meant it literally, with no reservations. And it was not easy to adjust himself to the staggering truth. Not until this moment had he understood how he loved her; her “office manner” had always kept him in check.

Again the clear, firm voice of the girl cut itself into his bewildered consciousness.

“It’s none of my business what you do or how you wish to spend your life. You’re grown up and you have a perfect right to your own ideas.”

On the face of it irrelevant, but Teunis understood only too well. She seemed to feel a harshness in the words and she modified them, Esther-like.

“Look at it in a practical way, Teunis, not emotionally. Oh, it’s all well and good, this talk about love, but that isn’t *all* there’s to it. Love isn’t the only thing needful; only half-baked novelists believe that.”

She walked to the middle of the room to put out the alcohol flame under the chafing-dish.

And curiously this little act of practical self-possession dashed Teunis's spirits more than her words had done. It placed her miles out of his reach.

"You're twenty-six years old (oh, I know; I'm six months older than you)—and where are you?" The question required no answer.

"I know all your arguments. This work is too stupid and that work is dull and the other is stultifying drudgery. Good Heavens, do you think my work is all fun? Or Kees Boerma's work?" Teunis winced. "I'm fagged sometimes so that I'm almost ready to drop, and there are things my whole soul cries out against. But I do them. Everybody does them."

She was speaking now with an incisive emphasis, forgetting her resolve to be kind.

"And you—you don't do them."

For the first time her voice quivered, but she quickly recovered control of herself.

"And as a result where are you? The butt of cheap newspaper jokes."

For the first time Teunis spoke.

"My God, Esther, you're not letting that come between us!"

"I'm not letting it," her voice carefully controlled; "it comes of itself."

She considered a moment.

"I know what you're thinking—that I'm afraid of a bit of ridicule, no courage to face the world—big mental flourishes, grandiose ideas about 'dare to be a Daniel,' and all that sort of thing. But it doesn't work, Teunis. What do you suppose I've been fighting for all my life?"

Surprised at the abrupt question, Teunis found nothing to say, but neither was it necessary. Esther rushed on.

"I've had just about enough of being out of it. That's the one thing that has eaten into me. What's the use beating about the bush?" her eyes again hard with determination; "if I marry—if I marry at all, it's going to be a *successful* man."

Then she repeated, "A *successful* man."

It struck Teunis as a bit droll that she was doing all the talking, he sitting there like a school-boy having a reprimand administered to him. But there was nothing he could say. It seemed supremely ridiculous to speak of his work. For the time being, in that atmosphere of prosaic practical common sense, he saw himself almost as the creator of "The Pugnacious Poet" saw him. Esther's voice broke in on him again.

"That's low-minded and calculating, no doubt—oh, I know all about how you look at it. But it's sense, nevertheless. I made up my mind to that years ago. I was always out of it when a little girl and I tell you it ate into me. My father—you know all about that, I needn't go into that. I promised myself then I'd win a place for myself. I'd make people look up to me. —I've done that, I've won a place. And do you think I'm going to throw it away the moment I've won it?"

She stood looking down at him with level eyes and he felt very small.

"Don't think for a moment I'm so in love with my work that it takes the place of the real thing. I'm not going to be fool enough to pretend that. But when I marry—if I ever marry—it'll be a man who can raise me up, not drag me down!"

Teunis shrank away at the words.

"Call me a materialist—calculating—scheming. It doesn't make any difference. At least I'm above-board about it. I'm telling you openly, since you forced me to speak."

Teunis found his voice, though it trembled a little.

"I'm not calling you anything, Esther—nor

—nor thinking anything like that of you. I didn't plan any of all this to-night. It just broke from me. I can't help it, Esther. I love you; you can't prevent that. But I won't bother you with it; I won't—drag you down. . . . Now I guess I'll go home if you don't mind."

He did not look for any relenting from Esther and there was none. They shook hands as if for a long parting. Then he opened the door and the darkness swallowed him up.

I called on Esther to learn if I could what was the matter with Teunis. For a time she was uncommunicative, almost curt. But I had come to feel almost like a father to her and soon she softened.

She offered some broken scraps of what had passed, quite voluntarily, as if it was a relief to speak. And suddenly, amazingly, the dear girl put her arms about my neck, as a daughter might with a father, and broke into low sobs against my coat.

I put my arms about her protectingly, my own eyes filling, and waited.

"I sent him away—for good—for always," she sobbed, "and I—love him!"

An electric shock ran through me and I held

the girl closer in my arms. (What a queer contraption the human mind is : in this tense moment I was not unconscious of the thought, "If Vanden Heuvel and the rest could see me now—me, dignified Professor Bakkerzeel!")

But my mind flashed back to Teunis. Oh, the joy of being the messenger of such news. And then swiftly I forgot even Teunis. The emotions of the past overwhelmed me. It was a quarter of a century ago, but I had the intoxicating illusion of holding *her* in my arms again. . . .

When I awoke, as it were, Esther had dried her eyes. She was looking up at me with her usual level gaze, very Esther-like.

"I don't know why I did this, Mr. Bakkerzeel." She released herself from my arms, even laughed a little. "I didn't mean to; it just—just came."

"Of course, Esther, of course—of course, it just came."

She read the gladness in my voice.

"It's true, Mr. Bakkerzeel," with Esther-like decision—"it's true, I love him. I'm not afraid you'll betray me to him because it won't make any difference. I sent him away and he understands it's for good. So for his sake you won't

tell him about this, for if he does not yet understand, I'll have to send him away again. I think *you* understand now."

I nodded miserably. There could be no doubt about it that she meant what she said. And that night I sat long in my lonely rooms trying to solve the enigma that was Esther.

CHAPTER X

THE merest tyro in things literary can foresee what the next step in the career of Teunis Spykhoven should have been. All the traditions point to a sharp face-about, for love's sweet sake, a meteoric success with the girl's sharp words prodding him, his return to claim her as a right, and then "Curtain."

I freely admit that some such wild hope was not entirely absent from my mind when Esther had made her confession to me. Perhaps love for her could make something out of Teunis. Did not a hundred thousand magazine stories confidently affirm that it always worked out that way?

The trouble is, with Teunis it didn't work out that way. His reaction to Esther's plain speaking resulted in the greatest vagary of his career so far. Long before the following summer at the truck farm had come to an end he had decided on what in my own mind I always tag as the "Walden experiment."

It was sheer madness from every conceivable common-sense point of view. I knew instantly how it would be received by the newspapers of De Stad. But Teunis was stubborn. He didn't

say so, but I thought I understood that, with the hope of winning Esther snuffed out, it did n't matter what others might think.

Or was he trying to work out the magazine-story formula after all—in his own Teunis-like way? Was the “Walden experiment” a case of pulling himself together for his supreme effort? Did he see himself amid the loneliness of the Island doing work too distinctive to be overlooked any longer, coming out of the experience a “success,” who could “raise Esther up, not drag her down”?

I don't know. He already had a firm grip on “Ghosts of To-morrow.” Even before “Solitude” was half finished, this new drama, which has proved to be the most distinctive contribution to American literature of modern times,¹ was clamoring for attention.

“But why go to the Island; why not do the new play right here in De Stad?” I put the question in the hope, frankly, of convincing him of folly.

¹ This is high praise, I realize, in view of the fact that Teunis Spykhoven wrote *Ghosts of To-morrow* at the age of twenty-seven. But is there any good reason why the youthfulness of the poet should prevent us from appraising his poetry at its true value? Didn't Keats do all his work before he was twenty-six?—K. B.

But he didn't know. He only knew that he thirsted for solitude. He felt he could write "Ghosts of To-morrow" on the Island. He seemed surprised that I did not understand instantly. I urged that poets had often done great work in crowded cities.

"Good Lord, don't I know that?" There was a hint of petulance in his voice. "And I hope I shall, too, many a time. But I want to get away from things now—and from people. After all, if I feel that way about it—even suppose it is only a foolish notion—what can it be of anybody's business? I've earned enough money to keep myself for a year or so; why shouldn't I indulge my whim?"

There was no good answer to that. If he wanted to spend the winter on the Island alone, Crusoe-like, who had a right to prevent him? So I desisted and Teunis went busily forward with his preparations.

By the middle of September the Island was deserted. The summer resorters who occupied the two or three dozen cottages returned to the cities as soon as the schools called back their children. Occasionally a family lingered on into early October, but more often the exodus was complete before the end of September.

Teunis contracted with Sharpe, the owner of the Island's single store, for provisions enough to carry him through the winter. Such things as this store could not supply he brought from De Stad in a motor boat. The distance between the Island and the Hammond Boat dock was approximately seven miles in a bee-line over the water. Its distance from the dunes of East Nassau was a little less than a mile and a half. From his cottage Teunis could always see the line of low hills beyond which lay the home of his boyhood, beyond which lived his mother. It was something to be so near her again.

There were three or four fully plastered cottages on the Island. One of these he leased for the winter. The woods were full of dead branches which would make excellent firewood; also the lake was constantly washing up driftwood. Teunis spent nearly a week with a buck-saw, laying in the winter's supply of fuel. He was amazingly practical about the whole venture. He had found out how many potatoes, on an average, went to a bushel, and on a basis of three to a meal he had laid in his supply accordingly. For meat he would have to depend on canned and salted goods, while occasionally he could row to the East Nassau dunes and walk five miles

along the beach to De Stad for fresh meat and other supplies in which his own stores might run low.

He set out one evening in the middle of October for his long tramp along the beach, all his preparations completed, ready for the six months of Crusoe life.

"I'll be as snug as a woodchuck in his hole, Mr. Bakkerzeel," he said gayly—"six months of solitude and work, no one to bother me, nothing to worry about: just work and saw wood, and watch the autumn go out and the winter come in, then the winter go out and the spring come in, and listen to the breakers on the beach, and explore the woods; dig out a rabbit occasionally, perhaps, and fish for perch through the ice on the Island's little bay; learn a little every day about this good old earth and the habits of winter birds and the ways of woodchucks and the moods of the trees. What more could anybody want?"

And truth to say, I envied him at that moment. I was passing through a trying ordeal at the college and was beset with worries. There was danger of losing the presidency a second time. It would be decided the following June and Vanden Heuvel had come into the open as

my rival. Oh, to be able to drop it all and go into sanctuary with Teunis Spykhoven on his island! What more could anybody want, after all? But I knew I wouldn't do it even if he had wanted me to come. The solitude would have bored me to the point of madness after the first three days!

But for the moment the picture looked inviting. I knew to what kind of an island he would wake to-morrow morning. The Island in mid-October! I had loved it as a boy when I had gathered beechnuts there and prowled solitary among the deserted cottages. There would be a smell of autumn in the air, a hint of smoke, perhaps, wafted across from the dunes of East Nassau. The leaves would be turning, and the woods would be a blur of brown and red, with here and there streaks of light green—reminders of summer. And the solitude! He would be able to let out his voice. He would be able to speak his lines against the lapping of the waves on the beach. He would prepare his breakfast over a wood fire (why is there no poetry in a coal fire?), and then the long day would be before him, and the evening with its mysteries, and the night with its peace. . . .

I had hoped, fatuously I admit, that the

"Walden experiment" would escape the attention of the newspapers of De Stad. And Teunis had been on the Island nearly three weeks before he was found out. But discovery was inevitable. There was sure to be some one among the "boys" who would wonder, on some dull day, what had become of "Shakespeare" and would investigate.

It was a big story, of course. No one could blame the papers for making the most of it. Only once before in American history had a similar experiment been made, and the world has not yet left off talking about it after the lapse of nearly three quarters of a century. Thoreau at Walden Pond stands out alone—a figure unique, laughed at by Concord village, privately set down as a little mad, which perhaps he was; or are all the rest of us a little mad?

And Concord-like, De Stad laughed. "The Pugnacious Poet" again! The modern Shakespeare up to a new vagary! Making a new bid for notoriety! The onion patch had palled and he must do something new to catch the attention of idle minds. Spend the winter alone on an island—communion with nature—inspiration, and all that sort of stuff! A genius for self-advertising!

It was the "News" that made the scoop on the story. But the "Eagle" and the "Post" followed close behind with "features." The "Eagle" bribed a photographer to develop into a picture a negative he had of Teunis and printed the cut on its first page, with the legend, "The New Henry David Thoreau," under it. The "Post," the only paper that put out a Sunday edition, sent Lapham, one of its feature writers, to interview Teunis and take a picture of his cottage. The interview was duly printed the following Sunday and it was a masterpiece. It said exactly what De Stad expected "The Pugnacious Poet," the literary freak, to say. I knew immediately, without being told later by Teunis, that what Teunis actually said to Lapham would probably not bear reproduction in print. He resented the interference, and he had not progressed much in controlling his temper since the day when as a student he had answered the vice-president of Christian College in language that is still being repeated secretly on the campus.

I was so much occupied with my own worries at the college that for nearly three weeks I did not go to see Esther. And when I did call at her office at last on a Thursday afternoon the news-

paper gossip about Teunis Spykhoven's "Walden experiments" had subsided completely.

And Esther did not refer to it. She was full of business, almost febrile with ill-suppressed energy. She was working hard, she said a bit shortly, and I took the hint to get up and leave her to her work.

But instantly she was all apology, a softened Esther, transformed magically from the hard business machine into the woman. And so patiently sincere was she in her concern to have me remain that I sat down again to bask in the warm glow of her. She always had the curious power of bringing back the past to me; and the load of pain of that past was somehow compensated for by the few grains of joy those years had held. And Esther was creeping into my heart deeper—deeper . . .

I referred to Teunis at last, trembling a little.

"Of course, they made the most of it," she said; "what else could you expect? I know most of those newspaper boys, and they're not a bad lot. Just human, and it wouldn't be in human nature to let such an opportunity slip."

Her coldly just analysis of the episode affected me disagreeably. Intellectually I admitted what she said. There was nothing for which to blame

the newspapers, but in spite of everything any one might say, I blamed them. And the reason? —I loved Teunis.

Could she have been so reasonable if she had loved him? I asked myself as I walked back to my rooms. And I wondered if her confession to me had been a dream. My heart ached for Teunis, and during a whole evening I forgot to worry about the presidency of Christian College.

CHAPTER XI

DURING all these years I had been vaguely—I almost said subconsciously—conscious of Nathalie Villener. It was nearly eight years now since that day in early spring when over my breakfast I read in the “Morning Post” that the Cretona had been raided by the police. Nathalie, you remember, was soon after packed off to Chicago by her uncle or her guardian or whoever it was had charge of her; Teunis Spykhoven went to New York; and Kees Boerma, whom I had rescued against my will as a brand from the burning, continued his honorable career at Christian College. Professor Kees never quite forgave me for the good turn I did him. I knew all the time that he sided with Vanden Heuvel in the fight for the presidency, although, since he was only a faculty member and not a council member, that didn’t make any material difference.

Then one day, about two or three years after the Cretona affair, there was something in the papers again about Nathalie. She was Nathalie Bird now—“Mrs. Nathalie Bird”—and for a time I didn’t connect her with “our Nathalie,”

as I thought of her. I haven't the story clearly in mind now, perhaps never had it clearly in mind; I was not the least bit interested in the affairs of "Nathalie Bird." But it had something to do with a police-court case, I remember. But who or what, or whether or not Nathalie was an innocent bystander, I can't recall. She was in it somehow and the newspapers described her as extremely pretty. "She sure is a 'Bird,'" I can imagine the "boys" punningly telling each other—which judgment was amply borne out by the cuts of her in a very large hat that they printed. Those cuts meant nothing to me; remember I had never met Nathalie Bird.

But a sarcastic remark Vanden Heuvel made some weeks later in reference to the scandal—or wasn't it a scandal?—made it dawn on me that the girl was indeed "our Nathalie." But I straightway put her out of my mind again; I was not glad to remember the part she had played in the life of Teunis Spykhoven.

Another year, or perhaps year and a half, passed, when the same girl in the same large hat again appeared in the newspapers of De Stad, this time in quarter-page advertisements. Wilkins Bird and Nathalie Bird were now owners of the Cretona and they flashily offered to

teach the dancing public all the newest steps. If I remember correctly, they called themselves the "Bird Dancing University," and I doubt not but Wilkins Bird adopted the title of "Professor."

In the years that followed, Nathalie Bird somehow, willy-nilly, achieved some sort of standing in De Stad. You know the type—always on the border-line of respectability, a bit flashy in dress, but not too much so, featuring rather often in the newspapers in connection with perfectly harmless, but also perfectly futile activities, sometimes even forcing her way by hook or crook into the gatherings of the social elect to be addressed by its members with icy politeness, always hoping to "get on top" by some lucky turn of fortune, sometimes lapsing into complete and unassailable respectability at last, and being doubly hard on all erring sisters.

Apparently Nathalie Bird had achieved this last or was in the process of achieving it. I was no longer conscious of her; in fact, I may say that I had about forgotten her. And I dare say Professor Kees Boerma had also long since put her completely out of his heart not only, but out of his consciousness as well, when one night,

late in March, she broke in on him like an evil ghost out of his past. It was near eleven o'clock, but Professor Kees was still hard at work on a paper on "Ethics in the Professions" that he was to read somewhere the following Monday.

There was a low knock at his door. He started, doubting that he had heard aright. It came again unmistakably—first two shorts, then a long, then two shorts again. It had been their signal eight years ago when he had called on her clandestinely sometimes. He had devised it himself. And now it broke on him across the years with the startling suddenness of thunder, those low, even knocks.

He laid down his pen and listened. Once more the signal crashed through the silence of the room. Kees sat still, fascinated. He was not in the least superstitious, and yet—Does the rigid celibate ever forget the soft arms that once encircled his neck? That it was Nathalie herself was as unthinkable to Professor Kees as that it was Nathalie's ghost. So he merely sat still, his eyes on the door: what would presently come through that door, the flesh and blood of the girl he had once loved or a dreadful shade such as are supposed to walk the earth at the midnight hour? No, Professor Kees was not super-

stitious, but he was not unconscious of a queer prickling at the roots of his hair.

He saw the knob turning. The door opened slowly—oh, so slowly it seemed to Kees—for an inch or two, then suddenly it burst open, and Nathalie Bird stood on the threshold, pale, disheveled, only half-dressed, wild, frightened, and yet somehow subtly theatrical.

Her first words also were theatrical, but less subtly so:

“For God’s sake, Clarence” (that had been her name for him)—“for God’s sake, save me; you loved me once!”

And with that she was across the room. She threw herself into his arms. He could not have helped himself if he had tried ever so hard. She clung to him, her arms tight about his neck, her head buried on his shoulder (in the approved manner of melodrama). The sobs that shook her were genuine and for a while she could not say another word.

Professor Kees’s first thought was for his landlady. She slept in a distant part of the house, but yet—

“Listen, Nathalie—Mrs. Bird! Don’t make so much noise! You’ll wake the neighborhood!”

Nathalie subsided, instantly cautious.

Professor Kees did not put her from him, afraid of unloosing another torrent of sobs. He held her in his arms, much as he had often done eight years ago, and there was material in the tableau to split the sides of the high gods of laughter.

But it was no laughing matter for Professor Kees. Thank God, his shades were all drawn! He looked over his shoulder to make sure that no half-inch slit of window space remained uncovered at the bottom. There would be no caller at this time of night, so for the present he was safe.

Reassured on this score, he turned his attention to the woman in his arms.

"Now tell me all about it—Mrs. Bird; but quietly—you don't want to wake Mrs. Gissing, you know you don't." There was appeal in his voice.

"Oh, no, no!" in a stage whisper. And she told him all about it. . . .

De Stad read it the next morning in the "Post." The cut of Nathalie was there again, the same old cut of the large hat, and a cut of the murdered man, Wilkins Bird. Triple-column, triple-decked headlines, black-face type, yards of reading matter that said nothing.

Wilkins Bird was dead with a pistol shot through his stomach. That was the only fact the newspapers had. And his pretty wife had disappeared—she had not left a trace. . . .

“I swear to God, Clarence, I didn’t do it; it was an accident,” she concluded. “I wouldn’t lie to *you*; you know I wouldn’t lie to *you* !”

Professor Kees was silent, busily thinking. Fear made him clear-headed. No one would think of tracing the girl to his rooms. It would be his business to get rid of her. He could not afford to be connected with the affair even as the most innocent bystander. They would rake up the past, the past that he had lived down by eight years of rectitude.

“I’ll pay you back, Clarence, I swear to God I’ll pay you back. I’ll work my fingers to the bone to pay you back.” She was getting hysterical. Also Nathalie always had a sure instinct for melodrama.

Kees said, “Hush, Mrs. Bird, you’ll wake Mrs. Gissing.”

“But I didn’t do it, Clarence. He shot himself. I merely tried to frighten him off, but he got the gun away from me. He was drunk and furious. For God’s sake, Clarence, listen to me. I couldn’t do anything else. I had to protect my

honor; a woman will give up her life rather than her honor. You know that. And for money. He was going to sell me to that brute for money—for a gambling debt. He brought him with him into our bedroom and I held him off with a pistol. But I didn't intend to shoot. I swear to God I didn't intend to shoot. You believe me, Clarence."

She shook the unresponsive college professor petulantly.

"Oh, yes," absently. Professor Kees was trying to see his way out. Besides, she was going over it for the second time and he was but half listening.

"But they won't believe it; there's nothing to prove it."

"There's no capital punishment in Michigan, Mrs. Bird." Professor Kees was not conscious of how brutal it sounded. But Nathalie with difficulty smothered a shriek.

"I had to run for my life," she went on presently. "There was no time to get any money; besides, I didn't have much in the house. I'm not asking much; only enough to get away. And I'll pay you back, I swear I'll pay you back. You loved me once, Clarence!"

But Professor Kees had understood from the

start that it would be fatal to give her money. She was sure to be taken sooner or later, and then his giving her money to escape with would, to say the least, look bad. It would come out at the trial. His good name would be dragged through the mud.

There was another course open to him, and Nathalie Bird never knew how near she came to being handed over to the police by her former lover. It was obviously his duty. And yet, and yet—

He saw himself on the witness stand. "But why did she go to *you*?" the prosecuting attorney was asking. And then relentlessly, "But you knew her?" And again, "When was it you first learned to know her?" And, "Isn't it true that you were sweet on her at one time?" And so on and so on. And later he would have to meet his classes. He would see the students hiding snickers behind their hands.

Yet if he gave her the money she begged for he might get himself into worse trouble than mere ridicule. Professor Kees was a bit vague on the subject of criminal law, but he seemed to remember it was a punishable offense to assist a criminal to make a safe get-away.

Nathalie was saying something or other to the

accompaniment of "swear to God." Professor Kees wasn't listening. He was helpless. There was some danger in every direction. If he sent her away empty-handed and she were taken, he might be drawn into it after all. But there was just a chance that her movements immediately following the crime would not be uncovered in detail. Some such phrase as "she wandered about for two hours" might be made to cover it. In any event, he must get rid of her without delay. The officers might be on her trail.

He pushed her quietly but firmly to the door.

"No, Mrs. Bird, there's nothing I can do for you. But I won't do anything against you. I might hand you over to the police, but—"

Nathalie's eyes were big with horror.

"My God!" she exclaimed in a whispered cry, and turning about she opened the door quickly and fled from the house.

And the mystery of the disappearance of Nathalie Bird remained a mystery. The newspapers lost interest in it after a week or so and the episode seemed closed. The earth had swallowed her up, and the warrant for her arrest lay undisturbed in a filing-case labeled "B" at police headquarters. And Professor Kees thanked God that he was safely out of it.

CHAPTER XII

TEUNIS came to my rooms early on a Saturday morning in April. He must have got up at daybreak (which in fact was his habit while on the Island). I had not yet had my breakfast and he had already rowed the mile and a half from the Island to the East Nassau dunes and walked the five miles from East Nassau to De Stad along the Lake Michigan beach.

There was an indescribable thrill for me in the fresh sight of him. I had worked late on Friday night, smoking too much and drinking a cup of black coffee. My sleep had been fitful. I had arisen with a general distaste for life, even though the day was to be devoted to the preparation of the letter of acceptance of the presidency of Christian College. For that such a letter would be needed later in the spring was quite certain now. Already in my mind I was formulating some of the phrases I should use: "the call of the church which is the call of God," "the unique service that a Christian institution can render." I would devote this whole day to the first rough draft of the all-important docu-

ment. But I hated to begin. My head didn't feel right. I was vaguely dissatisfied.

And then he broke in on me with the fresh vigor of his young enthusiasm like a cool breeze in the desert. Suddenly for the first time I caught myself imagining life without him. And the thought took me by the throat. The presidency of Christian College without Teunis!

I put the thought from me, gripping his hand.

"Early?"

He was a bit bewildered. It had not occurred to him that everybody else had not risen with the sun. He assumed that I had had my breakfast.

"I've been waiting since Thursday—finished it Thursday noon." He held up something wrapped with extraordinary neatness in a newspaper.

"The play?"

"'Ghosts of To-morrow.'" Curiously his voice vibrated with sternly repressed emotion. It was like a lover pronouncing the name of names. For the time being there was nothing else in the world for him but that play.

"I wanted some one to read it to."

Except for the fact that it would keep Teunis

with me all day, I can't say that the prospect was alluring. I would so much rather have merely talked.

The fact is that I had not taken Teunis Spykhoven too seriously as a poet at this time. Both "Everglades" and "Solitude" had been read to me, but they had somehow baffled me. I frankly hadn't decided if they were extraordinary or no. As for the slender collection of manuscript lyrics beginning with "Into the Shadows," I would not have dared to insist on their excellence, though a few of them were always haunting me. But the magazines had not wanted them and I was suspicious of my own appreciation. I didn't have the courage of my emotions. The two plays had become dog-eared with travel, so that even Teunis was losing interest in them.

You will have noticed that all through this narrative I have kept carefully away from literary criticism. Though sometimes tempted, I have not quoted from the plays. There have been no synopses of the plots, no learned disquisitions on structure, no discussions of their dramatics. To me Teunis Spykhoven always has been and still is so much more interesting than what he has written. And the professional

critics have taken care jolly well that his work was discussed.

But at this time Esther and I and a few professional readers in the offices of the theatrical managers were the poet's only audience. And our faith was at best only feeble.

For that reason I was all the less well prepared for "Ghosts of To-morrow."

Teunis unwrapped it from its covering of newspapers with extreme care. He was always extraordinarily meticulous about his manuscripts. He might have been unwrapping an ancient papyrus of fabulous value.

I smiled. The play was written in longhand and the sheaf of sheets was bulky. The poetry was interlarded with lines and paragraphs and whole pages of stage directions in red ink. I saw the writer's eyes gleam as he turned the pages lovingly, preliminary to beginning the reading, much as an organist plays a prelude.

"Your mother would have been a great actress by now, Teunis, had she lived," I heard myself saying irrelevantly, unaccountably.

"We might have had her read this for us." He assumed that I should have been there. Anyway, she was nothing to him. Tante Sarah was synonymous in his mind with "mother."

He continued turning over the pages, reading a bit to himself here and there.

"Shall we begin, Mr. Bakkerzeel?"

I started out of a day-dream: Suppose *she* were here now! Or was she indeed here? My skin felt prickly. When Teunis spoke I shook myself physically, as a dog does just out of the water, to free myself from something, I didn't clearly know what. Always I had been contemptuous toward the claims of "psychic researchers," as I thought of them, and was I going to yield myself to their nonsense now? What do I know about the spirit world—prosaic I, whose highest ambition was to become president of Christian College? But for a brief moment I had a very distinct "feel" of a *something* in the room with us. Then, common sense returning, I laughed.

Teunis was plainly surprised.

"Never mind, Teunis, I was laughing at myself, not at the play. Yes, let's begin."

And standing in the middle of the floor, erect, with the air of one who feels himself passing through one of life's great moments, sometimes rising on tip-toe as if to project his body into what he was saying, he began reading the apparently trivial apple orchard scene that all the world knows:

CONRAD (*calling excitedly*). Look, Mary, quick, the bees!

— followed by elaborately detailed stage directions about the clatter of tin pans and the ringing of the dinner bell to make the swarm settle among the branches of the trees. You have, of course, all seen Illington play Conrad. . . .

By noon the reading was finished and I was alone again. Teunis Spykhoven had returned to his island.

And although I had had no breakfast I am ready to confess that I forgot to go to lunch. It wasn't ecstasy, it was sheer bewilderment. I, Professor Kommer Bakkerzeel, prosaic apostle of common sense, sat there alone in my study completely unnerved, robbed of all self-confidence. That is what the reading of the play had done to me. And I could not shake it off, this sense of being a puppet of forces I didn't understand. Nor could I give a reason why "Ghosts of To-morrow" should have had that effect on me. There certainly is nothing in the story or in the handling of it that is in any way debilitating. Quite the contrary, it invariably leaves with an audience a thrill of pride in our common humanity in spite of all blemishes; it makes a man want to remain a man and not become a god.

Write the letter of acceptance! I laughed aloud, struck suddenly by the absurdity of it. Then I talked to myself audibly, as was my habit:

“Was she in the room, after all? The epic poets always opened with an invocation: was that more than mere rhetoric, I wonder?”

No use to remind myself now that the next morning I drank my breakfast coffee and ate my breakfast egg as usual in the Paris Restaurant, laughing at my notions of the day before and inwardly calling myself a silly old fool. Just then it all seemed tremendously important to me and tremendously real.

For one thing, I knew now that Teunis Spykhoven was a great new poet. That fact is more remarkable than it seems on the face of it. It is comparatively easy to believe in the genius of a man a thousand miles away—easy to believe that a Russian or a Hindu is a great poet. But the man sitting next to one in a street-car, or across from one at one's breakfast table! We smile at the idea. And Teunis Spykhoven I felt so near to me. In spite of the genius of his mother and in spite of “Everglades” and “Solitude,” in both of which, it must be confessed, he was not yet entirely sure of himself,

it had never occurred to me that the illumination that came from him was from divine fire. I had talked of his genius even years ago to others, meaninglessly, almost desperately, to take the sting out of his failures, but I had not been a "believer," in the mystic sense that that word assumes in the mouth of a faithful Mohammedan.

But now I *knew*, in the same way that we know about immortality, for instance. It required no argument. It was true because it was true—axiomatic. Somehow it couldn't be otherwise.

And suddenly I was *told* that it had always been true, only I had kept my eyes closed to it. Oh, the next day I called myself a fool, but the sentence stands—I was *told*. I didn't try to explain it then; I don't try to explain it now. Doubtless it was an interplay of the subconscious and the conscious mind (whatever that is), easily explained by science. I don't care what it was. And I understood that I was East Nassau and East Nassau was I, and the world was East Nassau and East Nassau was the world—all in the same conspiracy of unbelief. And the new seer had fought us all, as true seers have always fought—had resisted all attempts

to give him a stereotyped mould. And in the end he had conquered me as he would have to conquer all.

He had conquered me.

I didn't understand then what it meant, no more than Teunis Spykhoven rowing serenely from the sand-dunes of East Nassau to his island understood. But I knew at least that something extraordinary had happened to me.

And I was conscious of a something in the room with me. Don't worry, there will be no ghosts in this plainly prosaic narrative. I am merely setting down what I *felt*.

I tried to shake the feeling off.

"After all, I'm a sane, sensible man." I said it out loud, addressing the student lamp on my table. Then I laughed, but the laugh seemed to echo through the room, like the hollow cackle of an idiot. I shuddered.

I was conscious of an urgent sense of responsibility, and it was that that depressed me unaccountably. It was as if I would be held to blame if Teunis Spykhoven should not break through completely.

I said again, "Why, of course I'd do anything for him; absolutely foolish to think anything else."

But that didn't satisfy *it*. I find myself writ-

ing mystically; it's absurd, of course, but I can't avoid it if I am to make clear how I felt. . . . Nothing else must matter; it must be greater glory to help the seer break through than to ascend thrones of my own.

And that seemed very natural to me there alone in my study. What could be more important? Ought I not to call myself blessed among men for the opportunity?

I arose. For a moment I stood erect beside my table as a witness might stand in the presence of a judge. I don't know how to explain it, but I was conscious of an audience. And though I did not say a word, I was conscious of having spoken. And what I said was a promise. And that promise I should have to keep or expose my immortal soul to the blasting displeasure of high God. . . .

Ten minutes later I was in the street. And I laughed. I looked into the eyes of the sun, sinking a ball of red in the west. Little boys were playing marbles on the sidewalk; they made room grudgingly for me to pass through. An automobile was standing mud-bespattered at the curb. A girl with a very high color nearly collided with me. The surface car was rumbling a half a block away.

I laughed again: What a fool a lonely college professor may be now and then.

I was very hungry; I would order an extra large steak.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN accident finally gave the solution of the "Bird Murder Mystery" about six weeks later, the police, of course, wondered why they had not thought of it. For what could be more simple? The hunted woman knew about "Shakespeare" on his island as well as the rest of De Stad. A walk in the dead of night along the beach to the sand-dunes of East Nassau, the theft of a long-neglected rowboat, the loss of which would be credited to a storm, and, behold, her tracks were covered as effectively as if the earth had indeed swallowed her up, in the phraseology of the newspapers.

And so the "Bird Murder Mystery" transformed itself into the "Spykhoven Scandal." People talked of it tongue in cheek. Wilkins Bird was forgotten. He was underground and the world not appreciably the poorer for it. Nathalie eventually convinced a jury of twelve men tried and true that her version of the affair was the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help her God; as what young woman, pretty and tearful, can't convince any American jury of anything under the sun? There really was no

good reason but her fears why she should have wasted six weeks in hiding on the Island when she could have been certain of acquittal from the start.

It was from Nathalie's story to Teunis that I learned the facts about her midnight visit to Professor Kees's rooms. Professor Kees himself never let out a word, and it did not come out at the brief trial. Luck was with Kees all through.

"But why didn't you take a hint from it and get rid of the woman before she was found out? There was plenty of time." I fear I showed my irritation rather plainly; the things that were being said about Teunis Spykhoven had stung me almost to the point of madness. And the worst of it was the innuendo could not be met. "Of course a crazy young poet and an extremely pretty but loose young woman who were once in love with each other" (for that fact had, of course, been disentombed) "can live alone on an island for six weeks with everything fair and square and straight; nothing is *impossible!*" And with a knowing leer the speaker would pass on to another audience. . . .

Teunis did not answer me for a moment.

"Of course there was plenty of time, but what

was the use? Do you suppose I thought for a moment she wouldn't be caught?"

"Well, that was her lookout, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps, but I chose to make it mine. The longer she stayed the safer it would be to make a get-away at last. After a time they wouldn't be looking for her any more."

But I could not hide my irritation. He should have thought of what it would mean to him.

He turned on me then, eyes blazing.

"By God, Mr. Bakkerzeel, if you think I'm going to be a skunk for fear of talk, you've got another guess coming!"

I was silenced. Teunis repented his heat.

"Put yourself in my place," he said in a more reasonable voice. "I found her at dawn one morning. I had got up early to try for a few perch in the bay. And there she was on the beach, numb with cold. She had half buried herself in the sand for protection against the wind. What would you have done in my place?"

". . . She was too far gone to tell me the night's connected story then. But later before my hearth-fire of pine stumps she told me all.— Oh, I'm no innocent fool, Mr. Bakkerzeel. I know a thing or two about women, and about men for that matter, and Mrs. Nathalie Bird

isn't any better than she should be. She talked a lot of theatricals about a woman's duty to defend her honor with her life and all that sort of thing. And I suppose the poor thing believes every word she says, after a fashion. But that's neither here nor there. It's none of my business how chaste she has been or has not been. If a woman came to you, no matter who or what she was, and told you that her husband—her own husband, remember—had tried to sell her in payment of a gambling debt and she had killed him, and you had reason to believe she spoke the truth, what would you have done?"

I dared not meet his eyes. It all seemed so reasonable from his point of view.

"She may have done the killing herself or it may have been an accident, as she claims. I don't care a damn which. The man had it coming to him. She asked me to help her. Wouldn't you have helped?"

Again my answer was taken for granted.

"Of course I had to break into a cottage for her. Technically I suppose that's a crime. But she had to live somewhere while we waited for the hounds of the law to lose the trail. In another week or two we had planned to get her off to Chicago and then no one might ever have

been the wiser, provided she didn't lose her head, which I suppose she would have done anyway in the end. Good Lord, don't you think I was anxious to keep it under cover? Oh, of course, it was my duty to turn her over to the police and all that sort of rot. Well, I didn't. And how could I know that a prospective cottage buyer would come nosing about the Island as early in the spring as this?"

If all the luck had been with Professor Kees, certainly all the luck had been against Teunis—as it always had been, I thought bitterly, but in that doubtless I was wrong.

Neither of us said anything about Esther, but both of us were thinking of her, I'm sure. So this was the end of his supreme effort. Of course, "Ghosts of To-morrow" had been finished; but that didn't mean anything to Esther's world—might never mean anything to any one's world. And the affair with Mrs. Nathalie Bird had at one stroke put a million miles between Teunis and Esther. Esther, secretary of the Associated Charities, respected business woman to whom De Stad's best people went for counsel, who was often on public programmes; Teunis, the legitimate butt of newspaper jests, the unbalanced eccentric, a principal

now in a bit of vulgar scandal that thousands of highly moral people rolled under their tongues for all of its vulgarity.

Oh, I have forgiven those scandal-mongers long ago. In the first moments of passion I cursed them, but I remembered that they didn't know they were hurting an innocent woman. I remembered that they were kindly people, for the most part, who wouldn't have willingly hurt anybody—such a queer jumble is this queer, old, interesting world, with its good and its bad, its white and its black so hopelessly mixed!

But I confess it was hard at first; at least when Esther once more sobbed her heart out in my old arms as she had done a year ago. It was she now as much as Teunis I was thinking of—her happiness as much as his. It came to me with a shock of happy wonder that this was so. She was my little girl, and my protecting arm around her quivered with a yearning sympathy as though she were my daughter. Oh, it was hard to forgive those who were breaking the heart of my little girl!

“I'd like to go to him, Mr. Bakkerzeel,” she said at last.

A flash of joy shot through me. Once before

she had gone to him, years ago after the Cretona raid, and she had mystically lifted him out of the dust. "Into the Shadows" still lives as the fruit of that experience. I had blessed her then for it and I blessed her now.

I took her to the Island in a power-boat. We had dinner in the cottage, prepared by Teunis. Esther was cheerful, almost gay. She admired Teunis's housekeeping, except his coffee; it was too strong, she said—just like a man! And she got up and made some new, admonishing Teunis in the meanwhile that he must get himself a new coffee-pot. This one was three times too large. Then she was horrified to learn that he always made coffee for a whole day in the morning!

"Wasn't this better?" as she poured it daintily. I wasn't so sure, I always have been fond of strong coffee; but Teunis drank it as if it was nectar of the gods. It would have been almost ludicrous, if it had not been a little pathetic, the way he watched her every movement. All the self-confidence had died out of him. He was clay in her hands. I watched him fascinated, even as he watched Esther fascinated. And she, dear girl, was the only one who was her natural self. But of course I didn't

know what a fight she was making to keep things on a safe level of the commonplace.

Not a word about the scandal. It wasn't necessary. Esther's presence on the Island was her own personal answer to it. She was very kind, almost compassionate in her manner. It was as if she were trying to make herself a healing balm for the wounds he had received.

And as for Teunis, I think the full meaning of the scandal did not strike him until that moment. Until now he had been somewhat impatiently contemptuous about it. But all the pride went out of him now. Here was the woman his whole being hungered for, by the side of whom even his poetry for the time being seemed ridiculous and futile, and she had been placed a million miles beyond his reach—too far ever to be recalled to his side, so far that he could never rise up to her. My God, how he would be "dragging her down" now!

CHAPTER XIV

I DESPAIR of being able to give an adequate picture of Teunis Spykhoven's illness. That is the word—illness—that comes nearest to expressing what I felt about his condition. He was back in De Stad working at the Tandem Bindery, drawing from eighteen to twenty-one dollars a week in his pay envelope, and in his face were all the evidences of vigorous health that seemed a part of his personality. And yet whenever I thought of him it was invariably as of an invalid.

He made no attempt to have "Ghosts of To-morrow" accepted by a theatrical agency. He always put me off with the remark that it would have to be typed first. He'd do that some day, of course. But I knew perfectly well that he wouldn't. It was like the consumptive speaking of the time when he should "get over his cold." Plenty of time, plenty of time, a long life ahead!

I lost patience, and even became a bit snappy, I fear. But that, too, had no effect. "Everglades" and "Solitude" continued to come back,

and they would have lain forgotten in their wrappings had I myself not taken them in hand and sent them out again. Teunis was indifferent to their fate.

I had read of the fits of melancholy that have tortured some great poets, but those fits had always somehow seemed beautiful to me—appropriate, right, “in character,” as it were. They were the travail of creation, I had assumed lightly—necessary, fruitful. But Teunis Spykhoven’s illness was not that. It tended deathwards, no matter how his bodily health persisted, and I felt impotent to minister to a mind diseased.

If this were only the story of a big business failure I could splash about in sentimentality—beginning again in a cottage, loyalty of friends, hope of better days ahead, courage to face the new future—you know the formula. But this—nothing to lay hold of: Teunis working prosaically in the Tandem Bindery, eating his three square meals a day, never referring to the past or only with baffling casualness. But because of the very intangibleness of it my uneasiness increased.

And Esther felt it too. “How’s Teunis?” was always one of her first questions, as if he

were a patient in a hospital. And my invariable, "All right," spoken with careful matter-of-factness, deceived neither of us.

And yet he laughed about as much as usual and there was rather more than I had been used to of the biting quality in his speech, that had won him the ill-will of some of his newspaper fellows. He was anything but an invalid; rather, he was slowly developing claws.

And that somehow frightened me. Claws and "Ghosts of To-morrow" were antipathetic. But what could I do? And yet I had promised to do something. I laughed bitterly, remembering how I had made the promise.

I put it straight to him:

"What's the matter with you, Teunis?"

He showed genuine surprise. It was in my study on a Friday night. He was smoking one of my cigars.

"What do you mean?"

I saw he was not conscious of his "illness," or he had become so used to the state of mind that it seemed entirely normal. And it was hard to put it into words, but I think I succeeded after a fashion.

He pondered it. "I didn't know I was growing into a bore, Mr. Bakkerzeel. But I'll reform.

Give me a day or two to practice in and I'll be gladder than the gladdest bundles of love and sunshine in all the *glad* books ever invented. I'll be a 'morning-face.' Life is so comic that a man must be a dull fool who can't manage to pretend happiness at least; and that's all anybody wants."

I shuddered. Cynicism. But he said it laughing. There was something disarming about him. How could I go on with the probe I had determined on?

And the next time I saw him he was full of forced gayety. But to me it was almost tragic. Was this the man who had written "Ghosts of To-morrow"? And what was the good of converting me to faith in his genius if it was to end there? The writer of that poem seemed dead and an alien was masquerading in his clothes.

There was no whining, and any one but me might easily have been deceived. But I remembered his mother. She, too, had been too proud to whine. She had gone to her death almost with a laugh; and she had known beforehand that it would be death for her; how she had known that I don't pretend to say. But she never indulged in self-pity. If she had done that I might have been able to forget. But because she

had been strong she was still for me an accusing personality after twenty-eight years.

"You won't do anything desperate, Teunis?" The question was wrenched from me one evening against my will.

He laughed. "Suicide?—Don't worry, Mr. Bakkerzeel; I'm going to keep on inflicting myself on the so-called human race for a great many years to come. Aren't I being cheerful? I thought I was making a noise like acting little 'morning-face' to perfection. But I must be a poor actor. No, I'm not of the suiciding type. And what in the world would I suicide for?"

I was reassured, more by the levity of the tone than by the words themselves. But it was clear that he could not go on in this way. Always I was conscious of a feeling that something must happen. It was like sitting at the bedside of some one desperately ill, waiting for a crisis—hoping and dreading.

"Of course, they're down on you now, but people forget." I was always saying things to him apropos of nothing in particular; the subject was so much on my mind.

"The scandal of the Island? Let 'em think what they damn please. It 'ld serve 'em jolly well if I should go in for something of that sort

—find a flapper somewhere and start up house-keeping without benefit of clergy. I've got half a mind to try it out. I would if it weren't for pity of the poor girl; at least, if I'm as much of a bore as you're always trying to make out." He laughed good-naturedly. But there was no health in his laugh.

I did not take him seriously.

"You can live it down, Teunis. It isn't as hard as writers try to make us believe. People don't hold out against even a woman who falls—they don't keep it up forever in spite of all the plots that have been built on the theme. And much less a man. A year or two, a success with 'Ghosts,' and no one will remember that there was ever a whisper against you."

"Of course I could live it down—if it was worth the trouble."

Again I shuddered, unaccountably.

"And she doesn't believe it." He knew I referred to Esther.

"Of course not." I had the uncomfortable sense of having said something silly; to recover my dignity I struggled on: "Then, why in Heaven's name don't you buck up?" I'm afraid I showed my irritation but too clearly.

Teunis laughed mockingly.

"There's no satisfying you. You're a glutton, Mr. Bakkerzeel—you want to eat cheerfulness, and the more you eat the more you want. You'd make a great little character in a *glad* book!"

But I kept him on the subject of Esther. The more he dodged it the more I pressed him. I was relentless.

"Oh, it's so silly to talk about it!" he burst out, irritated in his turn. "Of course I love Esther. You'd be blinder than a bat if you didn't know it, so what's the good my beating about the bush? And of course she's given me the sack. I'd go through hell if that would win her, but it won't, so what's the use?"

And all I could do was to echo impotently, "What's the use?"

"I suppose she told you about it—last year, long before I hit on the fool notion of going to the Island?"

I nodded.

"But I wouldn't believe her—not really. I thought I believed her, but I didn't. How could I have written 'Ghosts of To-morrow' if I'd honest-to-God believed her?"

He laughed harshly. "Like a fool I was waiting for a miracle. She was so absolutely right I

didn't have a leg to stand on. I was a failure—a joke. And Esther's—well Esther's Esther. And a princess doesn't marry a court fool even if she should be abnormal enough to love him. The world would literally laugh them out of court, and the princess would be the real victim, not the fool. But I had an absurd notion that a good little devil or something could somehow, some day, wave his wand and change me from the jester in cap and bells to the prince. So I went to my island."

He shrugged his shoulders, indicating a hiatus.

"The Secretary of the Associated Charities, the friend of ministers and editors, the adviser of philanthropists doesn't marry a sort of male flapper!"

"But, good Heavens, Teunis, you aren't that!" I cried. His calmness was disarming.

"No, and she doesn't think me such, but the rest of the world does, so it comes to the same thing. She's as helpless as I am. And this time it's for good. You can see that. You complain I'm getting cynical. I suppose I am. But what else is there? It's merely a sort of self-defense. I'm covering my heart with a few layers of tough hide. If I didn't I'd develop into a sniv-

eling sentimentalist, shedding tears over the wreck that was worthless to begin with. I happen to despise that kind of animal, so I'm trying my best to be another kind, but you must give me a little time. There's a whole lifetime ahead of me to practice in!"

"But your work, Teunis?" The word no longer meant "career" in my mind, so far had I come; it was synonymous with "poetry" now.

"That'll take care of itself," he said carelessly. "If there's any more of it in my system I suppose it'll ooze out one of these days. And if not—"

He shrugged his shoulders again. Back across the years my mind flashed to his mother. Just so had she defied the gods with a gleam of inextinguishable pride in her eyes. I had a mystic sense almost of addressing her through him:

"But you'll kill your genius—murder it with cynicism. All the poets have been great lovers—"

"And most asses have been great lovers too," he broke in rudely. . . . "Well, if they've all been great lovers, it would be something of a novelty at least to vary the monotony and

prove to the world that a poet is possible without the grand passion."

But I knew that he knew that that was not possible. Lose her he might and still live and grow; often it had been that very thing that had made great poets of mediocre ones. But not if he allowed the experience to harden him. A cynic can't be a poet; a poet's daily bread is "admiration, hope, and love."

I tried again. "You can't hope to banish love out of your life and live—live spiritually."

And Teunis knew that this was not only truth, but common sense. But he hardened his heart to deaden the pain, and for many days he stayed away from my room, avoiding me. Instinctively I knew that he had withdrawn within himself to think his way out. And the moment he stepped across my threshold I knew that here was crisis.

"I'm going away," he announced without preliminary.

"Going away?" It sounded parrotly. Then I added, "Going away where?"

"I don't know, but I'm going. I've figured it out and I'm going. I'm a fool for staying on here."

"But why?" I was bewildered and a stab of

fear shot through me. To go on without him! I had not appreciated till this moment what it would mean. To be president of Christian College without Teunis! To drag out my life through the lonely years without him. To die at last, with him on another continent, perhaps. I confess freely that it unnerved me. And I am proud now that it did.

"You hit it right when you said I was growing into a crab. The air doesn't agree with me here. Suppose we put it that way. I need a change of scene. I'm going to break loose—loose from everything and everybody. I did that once before, but I was an amateur then. This time I'm going to burn a few bridges. How would Central India do or the interior of China—become a native?"

I thought he was joking.

"Anyway, it would be better than souring here and turning into a crab. There may be all kinds of interesting things and people over there; I have a notion there are, and I'm rather good at this solitude business."

I began to see that the idea really fascinated him.

"And your poetry?"

"That's on the knees of the high gods. And

this little old world will wag along without it, I guess, in a pinch. That's the least of my troubles."

"What do you mean—burn bridges—cut loose from Tante Sarah and Esther and—and—me?"

He nodded, evidently in perfect seriousness. "It'll be something of a wrench at first, but you'll soon get over it. And as for me, it'll be the only way for me to get over it."

No whining. It was a plain statement of fact. Teunis Spykhoven was being very practical, with that whole-hearted intensity of which most of the rest of us so-called practical men are incapable.

"And what about the plays, Teunis—the ones that have already been written?"

"The plays?" He laughed. "Oh, I bequeath them to you in my last will and testament. And may God have mercy on their souls!"

And after that I couldn't get him to be serious. I wasn't quite sure that the whole thing wasn't a huge joke. But the fear gnawing at my heart proved that to me at least it was not a joke.

But joke or not, certain it was that Teunis Spykhoven had come to the end of a chapter in his life. To-morrow he would turn the page.

CHAPTER XV

THE letter was only ten lines in length, but I spent a whole evening in its composition, writing it first in longhand because I'm one of the older generation that has not learned to think on the typewriter. But when at last it was in the form I wanted I reduced it to typescript, being careful to make two carbon copies. One of these I filed away, folding the other and putting it into the inside pocket of my coat. The original I placed in an envelope that contained on its face the typewritten address of the Reverend William M. Helder, D.D., president of the council. Sealing the envelope carefully and placing the stamp on it with the meticulousness of an artist, I stood for a moment holding the letter up before me against the light of the lamp. Then, without stopping to put on my hat, I walked into the balmy June night to the corner of the street and dropped the letter into the post, clicking the lid twice, as my habit was, to make sure my letter had dropped to the bottom of the box. The college chimes across the street sang out a quarter to twelve. I could go to sleep now, for my bridges were burned.

The next morning I called on Esther. She received me in her little parlor; it was Sunday and she was at home.

She read me like a book. "What is it, Mr. Bakkerzeel?" a bit anxiously.

My air of casualness broke down instantly.

"I'm here for a sort of a farewell, Esther—that is, in a way," I stammered, the fear gripping me that this intensely practical little person would think my manner theatrical.

"Farewell? What do you mean?"

"I'll be going before long and I thought I wanted to tell you, now that it's all settled. Don't know why, only somehow I wanted you to understand."

She was bewildered and I had difficulty explaining myself to her. Unconsciously I was being a bit theatrical, after all, groping about for climax. I had meant to show her the carbon copy of my letter as an introduction to what I was going to tell her, but my hand drew forth instead from my inside coat pocket a tissue-paper covered photograph. Carefully unwrapping it, I handed it, brown with age, to the surprised Esther.

"The mother of Teunis when she was a girl." I answered the question in her eyes.

"Oh!" was all she said, but it had the effect of a little gasp.

"You are the only one, Esther, except myself, who has seen this photograph in twenty-eight years."

And straightway I hated myself for saying this. I *was* being theatrical. And it did not escape Esther.

"She must have been very beautiful," she said politely.

I forced myself not to descend to meaningless banalities.

"You wouldn't understand, Esther, if I did n't make a clean breast of everything. You'd be wondering and calling me a fool when I drop everything and go away with Teunis."

"Go away with Teunis?" she broke in.

I had failed to remember I had said nothing to her about that as yet. So I explained, Esther attentively listening in complete silence.

"He needs some one. He needs sympathy and understanding—and—love. I've come to understand, Esther, that that is what my life is for—to help one greater than I to realize his great gift, to save him for the world. For twenty years I thought I was 'called' to be president of Christian College. And now when I have it for

the taking, I find that it wasn't a 'call' at all—that I'm needed for a much bigger work."

Esther smiled faintly at my grandiloquence.

"Let me get this thing straight, Mr. Bakkerzeel. I'm all mixed up. I want to know just exactly what you are talking about."

"Yes, Esther," meekly.

"In the first place, Teunis is going away?"

I nodded, then shrugged my shoulders when she asked me where.

"Into vagabondage, I take it. He's lost his grip. Wants to break loose. You know he did that once before. He has discovered De Stad is only a larger East Nassau and he wants to get it out of his system—his own phrase."

"And you're going with him?"

"To help him, Esther—to devote my life to him."

Esther smiled again. I could see she was not taking me very seriously. And her next question further proved this.

"But you're going to be president of Christian College—that's all settled, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's all settled." But I didn't mean what she thought I did. I handed the carbon copy of my letter to her. She read it with businesslike concentration.

"But you're not going to send this?" For the first time she spoke with complete seriousness.

"I mailed it last night—burned all my bridges." I said it with a little thrill of satisfaction. She would believe me now.

It was plain that Esther didn't know what to make of it.

"All my life, Esther, I've been serving false gods and I thought I could get away with it"—smiling faintly at the slang—"but I can't."

Esther looked down at the photograph in her hand, more bewildered than before.

"I had to tell you all, Esther, so you will understand why I'm going. The world will laugh and call me crack-brained. My going will be unmotivated in people's minds. A man doesn't disrupt his life for a mere friend."

The liquid softness of Esther's eyes encouraged me.

"Tell me about her," she said, indicating the photograph.

"She was an actress and foreign-born and not of my religion. I met her in Chicago while I was doing summer post-graduate work. She was—well, the photograph will tell you. And I was a rather clumsy young college professor—nothing

in me to appeal to her. But she—loved me, Esther."

But how was I to make it all clear to Esther? Easy enough to say, "We sinned!" Esther was not a child for whom the unpleasant facts of life must be veiled. But wouldn't she think the woman I had loved had been weak—"light," perhaps? For Teunis's sake, if for nothing else, not that! How to make Esther see her as she had been. That's why I had brought the photograph. But it was all so inadequate.

But Esther understood. My very inarticulateness seemed to convey to her what I could not express. And she did not exclaim over the revelation. There was a brief, sharp shock of surprise; then she accepted it in the common-sense businesslike way that was the very soul of Esther. . . .

"She loved me," I went on presently, "and I—"

But I checked myself. An old man sentimentalizing about a love-affair of a quarter of a century ago must be of all creatures the most ridiculous. It would not seem plausible to a hard-headed person like Esther that there could be left in my heart a real glow for the woman I had wronged. And I was too much afraid of

appearing sentimental to admit that during the years I had built up a dream-woman who seemed more real to me than flesh and blood and living eyes.

Esther's eyes fluttered, but she did not lose hold on her grip on the things that are, even though her voice trembled a little.

"But why, Mr. Bakkerzeel—why didn't—I mean—" She pulled herself together: "To be entirely plain, why didn't you marry her?"

"Because I was a coward!" I felt a savage satisfaction in lashing myself.

Esther made an involuntary gesture of protest, but I went on:

"You know East Nassau, Esther, and De Stad. And all through boyhood and youth I had fed on the good opinion of East Nassau. It was meat and drink to me. It and De Stad were my whole world. And I had but recently been given the chair of Latin in Christian College. Think of what that meant to me. Think of what that kind of thing means to Kees Boerma: I was a Kees Boerma, not a Teunis Spykhoven!"

I smiled bitterly; the words were ashes on my tongue.

"East Nassau admired me. I was one of its sons and I had attained a dignity of position

beyond the most sanguine dreams of any of them. I was the one man in East Nassau who had climbed to the top. I loomed in their imaginations as a demigod. Worse still, I came to think of myself as a demigod."

Esther was listening quietly and with a judicial air.

"And *she* was an actress and foreign-born and not of my religion! And I had my career to make. She was too proud to go to the usual vulgar expedients. If I wouldn't take her freely and whole-heartedly, she would go it alone. But in the end her proud resolves broke down and she came to me; it was her illness that weakened her will. I was in a panic, but I managed to cover it up. And for a moment after she died I felt relief. I was *glad* she was dead!"

I was startled by the brutal sound of it.

"Glad she was dead; felt relief," I repeated, trying to soften the tone; "felt relief for a moment—a *moment*!"

I was conscious of losing control of myself. But I read in Esther's eyes that she understood.

"Before she died I promised I'd find a real mother for the baby. And that promise I have kept. But what kind of a father have I been? I

hadn't the courage to own him. I see now what my life might have been, but too late. I've lived a dry, narrow, loveless life, when I might have had Teunis, the fresh beauty of his boyhood, the joy of watching his genius grow—helping him, sympathizing with him. . . . But instead of all that I fed on the dry husks of honors and the good opinion of my colleagues. I was a coward, Esther—afraid of life. And I have a coward's reward."

"Don't, Mr. Bakkerzeel!" It was a plea, her voice quivering.

"I gave him at least a mother, and for a time I hoped—I hoped, Esther—"

I hesitated.

"Yes, Mr. Bakkerzeel."

The softness of her tone surprised me. I tried to look into her eyes again, but she kept them downcast. There was a tenseness about her bearing. I divined that she was hiding tears.

"You know how it is with a lonely old man. He gets notions—queer notions. Talks to himself out loud and makes himself believe queer things. I got a notion that *she* was in the room with me—sometimes late at night. And she seemed to tell me things—not in words, but somehow. I can't explain. And she seemed to

tell me about you, Esther, after I had learned to know you—your gentleness, your honesty. And in time I came to believe that that way lay—how shall I say it?—that that way lay—expiation.”

Esther said nothing. Looking up, I still saw her sitting with her eyes downcast.

“Oh, I know it’s preposterous after all that’s happened, Esther, but I had my foolish dreams. I can’t expect you to see it as I do and I can’t expect you to sacrifice your life for me or for him. He needs love in his life—its great stabilizing influence. The world thinks he’s a failure, but he isn’t. He has been true to his best instincts. And because those instincts led him out of the ordinary humdrum grooves, on to the outbound road, he has suffered. And all his life he’s going to have a battle. Even when success and recognition come, he’ll have to fight to be true to his great gift. All the world is East Nassau—little place in it for prophets, not understanding them, often applauding them only when they fall short of their own truth. And they need a ballast of real sympathy close to them to keep them true.”

I sighed. Why was I saying all this?

Then Esther did a curious thing. Arising, she

came and stood beside me and stroked my hair. One hand was on my shoulder and mine closed over it.

"He needs the love that has been the strength of all great poets. And I hoped for a long time he would find it in you, Esther. But that dream is past and so I'm giving myself as a substitute."

Looking up I saw Esther smile, but also there was a suggestion of tears in her eyes.

"Oh, I know I'm a ridiculous old man, but I can help him a little. He'll let me when I tell him all. He can't turn his own father out of his life. And I'll try hard to make it up to him. That will be my career from now on!"

The amazing Esther laughed, and for a moment a cold chill ran through me. But I instantly knew that the laugh was not one of derision, but to hide her emotion.

"Forgive me, Mr. Bakkerzeel, I wasn't laughing at you — at myself!"

For a little neither of us spoke, both of us conscious of a loss of control over our voices. I sat looking down at the tips of my shoes. The hand on my shoulder tightened its grip. Then, without seeing her, I felt her coming nearer, the fragrance of her enveloping me. I felt her pressing my grizzled head against her breast, and

then I was thrilled by the touch of her lips on my hair.

Releasing me suddenly, she ran into another room, and I heard her low sobs which she was evidently trying hard to repress. I waited miserably, not knowing if it were better to stay or go. She had carried the photograph with her.

An hour I waited, two hours. There was silence in the other room. I found my hat and tip-toed out of the house. . . .

Late in the afternoon I called to reclaim my photograph. No traces of tears remained. She took my hat. She was again the self-possessed Esther, confident, practical—humor in her eyes.

She poured me a cup of tea.

“Do I look dependable, Mr. Bakkerzeel?”

I could only stare my surprise. She laughed.

“And stable—and well-balanced—and—and—well, nice?”

Her voice faltered a little, and I succeeded somehow in assuring her she looked all that and everything else that was beautiful.

“And he needs a stabilizer and all the other things—what did you tell me he needs?”

An electric shock of happy surprise passed through me. But I instantly repressed it, not daring to believe.

"Sympathy," I faltered in uncertain voice.

"Sympathy, yes, and—and love?"

"And love, Esther," joy now ringing in the words. "They all need that, the really great poets—the love of a woman—the love that even I can't give him."

We stood facing each other in the middle of the room. She placed her hands on my shoulders and smiled up into my eyes. And the happiness of that smile will go with me to the end.

"And that's what I need too, Mr. Bakkerzeel—sympathy and—and love!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE story of our exodus from De Stad and of the odyssey that followed need not be told here. With Esther at his side Teunis would have been content to remain in De Stad making his living unobtrusively in the Tandem Bindery until such time as his real work should win the recognition—and the dollars—of the crowd. To the end he remained contemptuous toward the East Nassau spirit. With Esther and his work and me (at least I hope he included me) he could have enjoyed his life in De Stad in the face of any or all ridicule De Stad might choose to heap upon him.

But Esther could not have stayed on, and the moment he understood that, Teunis was eager to go. Also, Esther understood one thing about Teunis's work which Teunis himself had never appreciated. A writer of stuff to be printed may live anywhere; usually the farther he stays away from New York and the closer to the soil and the traditions and the spirit that produced him the better for his work. But a man who writes stuff to be acted must be on

the ground where the acting is done—in New York, in short.

Esther cut to the heart of this immediately, with that clear, common-sense penetration which more than anything else characterizes her. When once she had surrendered to him, Esther became even a firmer believer in him than I. I had my moments of doubt, but Esther would never admit that anything greater than "Ghosts of To-morrow" had been written in America. And she believed just as firmly that a greater than "Ghosts" was yet to be.

But this blind faith did not rob her of common sense.

"What's the good of writing a great poetic drama if nobody ever hears of it?" she asked, assuming confidently that so reasonable a question merited a reasonable answer. And since both Teunis and I were as helpless as babes she supplied the answer herself:

"It's our business now to get it *acted*. That's what it was written for—to be acted, wasn't it?"

Which was literally true. Whatever hostile criticism has ever been brought against the plays, no one has ever charged that they don't *act*. Oh, I know, poets who lack the dramatic

sense are in the habit of despising the *actability* of the plays they write; but why, in Heaven's name, do they write plays at all if they don't care to have them produced?

"And that needs managing and wire-pulling, perhaps, and careful scheming," Esther went on; "and to stay on here would be like conducting an intricate and delicate piece of business by long-distance telephone. We'll have to be on the ground."

She was, of course, ten times right. And how she "managed" and pulled wires and schemed is also a story in itself—as dramatic a story, perhaps, as any Teunis Spykhoven ever wrote. She translated her love for him into such prosaic acts as dogging producers day after day, scheming to secure a hearing, lavishing on the job all the wonderful power of concentration that had made her a business success in De Stad. She brushed aside impatiently all the hifalutin notions which Teunis and I sometimes advanced about the inherent dignity of poetry. Dignity, stuff and nonsense! No more dignity about the job of getting the greatest poem produced than there is about putting on the boards the silliest musical comedy. As usual she went straight to the heart of things:

"Writing it and getting it put on are two different things. Talk all you like about the dignity of creating the thing, but getting it accepted and produced is purely a business proposition, and it's foolish to mix up the two. They have nothing to do with one another. I'm in charge of the business end of this company and I'm not going to be hampered by any silly notions about dignity. If I can put America's greatest poetic drama"—with a mock bow to Teunis, who looked sheepish at the barefaced flattery—"if I can put America's greatest poetic drama across by bribing a producer with ten-cent cigars, nobody's going to stop me."

I laughed, remembering her effective trick with reporters in De Stad.

And somehow she did succeed in "putting it across," although it took her three years to do it. Esther was not only a very resourceful, but also a very persistent, little person. Meanwhile, under Esther's careful management, we lived very comfortably on Teunis's and my earnings at occupations that were not always top-heavy with dignity. . . .

How success came like an avalanche when at last it did come, all the world knows. But what all the world does not know is that for three

years before it came a woman patiently and painstakingly cleared away the obstacles that gave the avalanche a chance to begin its thundering descent. And the world does not know what I mean when I say that Esther is the better poet of the two. But Teunis understands it and he kisses her right before me. And Esther calls us both silly children, which in fact we are, but that does not prevent her from kissing me on the top of my grizzled head and laying her cheek caressingly on my shock of hair. And I charge her with being the man of the house, which charge she doesn't resent, and she says I'm a nice old grandmother. And Teunis, deep in his work, forgets her for days at a time, but she seems to understand that too and calls him a silly child to his face. And we are very busy, and very much occupied, and very happy.

And I indulge in half-teasing, half-serious banter.

"Didn't I tell you, Esther, that that was what he needed—love?"

And Esther answers dryly, secure in my complete knowledge of her great love for him.

"Yes, and there's something else a great poet needs besides love."

And when I ask her what, she says, "Some one who can supply ordinary common sense for two."

And then we both laugh, and the light in her eyes tells me that her love for her famous husband is perhaps all the greater because she does not lose her confident little head about him too much.

She understands immediately when he wants to see Foppe Spykhoven again. I myself, I'm ashamed to confess, believe for a moment that it is to triumph openly over the broken old man. But Esther understands. Teunis doesn't take the trouble to explain; it isn't necessary. Nor does he explain why he wants to go alone. He is strong now and dominant, and East Nassau will never again place his soul in jeopardy. He is strong enough now to try to make clear to his foster parent that the harsh judgments of his early youth have been softened by the years.

I close my eyes and the scene of that meeting etches itself against a background of darkness. . . .

Foppe Spykhoven looks up from the large Dutch Bible he is reading when Teunis opens the door of the familiar kitchen unannounced. Teunis is immediately struck by the change in

his face. He is still stern and dignified, but a certain confidence in himself has gone out of it. And the old hands that hold the large Bible are lean and they tremble. There is also something shrunken about the whole figure that straightway arouses Teunis's pity as he stands there for a moment in the doorway, holding the door open.

But the impression of defeat is only momentary. With a sudden reassertion of his old spirit of domination, Foppe Spykhoven hurls something of the old-time terror into that short word: "*Nu!*"

He straightens his back and sits waiting. Teunis stands in the doorway, uncertain what to do or say. If only Tante Sarah were in the room! Teunis cannot say a word. All at once he is overcome with so deep a pity for the broken old man that he dares not trust his voice. Hand extended, he steps across the kitchen floor in silence. Foppe Spykhoven rises with a quick, precipitate movement that throws the large Bible violently from his knees to the floor. There still is resistance in his bearing, but there is the dawn of something in his face that gives Teunis courage to go on. The old hand trembles while it rises, as if drawn to the hand of Teunis

by some invisible power. It wavers a moment, and then a quiver of joy passes through the body of Foppe Spykhoven as the weak and wrinkled hand lies in the warm clasp of Teunis.

Not a word has been spoken. The large Bible lies forgotten on the floor. The door through which Teunis has entered stands open. The old clock on the mantel shelf is ticking with a preternatural loudness. Tante Sarah's cat enters the room noiselessly and looks up at the two men standing there hand in hand looking into each other's eyes. In the years of the future neither of them will desert his own ideals, far apart as the poles, but the new-found understanding that each reads in the eyes of the other, and which is but another name for the love of one strong man for another, will bridge the gulf. After the first moment of inarticulate emotion their bond of friendship will be reserved and dignified; but each man knows that the tie can never again be broken.

It is this scene that Tante Sarah comes upon as she enters the room. A smile passes over the seamed face of Foppe Spykhoven. Teunis turns to his mother with an inarticulate cry. He feels the violent beating of her heart as he presses her against him convulsively.

Foppe picks up the large Bible and lays it on the table reverently. He stands for a moment in a dignified attitude of prayer, his face turned away from his wife and his foster son, his old hands leaning on the table. Tante Sarah looks at him fondly through her tears of happiness. Teunis sees that look of tenderness, and the poet in him rises to an understanding of its meaning. He bends down and again kisses her withered lips.

And that picture of Teunis in the arms of Tante Sarah is undying. Sometimes at night, in the loneliness of my room, when our quiet corner of the great city is asleep, I take out a photograph brown with age. And as I look into the well-remembered eyes, the reproach that filled them all these years gradually softens into forgiveness. The tragic failures of my life somehow appear less ignoble because I did what I could to give her poet-son the love of two true women. After a while I close my eyes and the room seems filled with her presence. And then I bow my head and I seem to feel the touch of her hand upon my hair.

THE END

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